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BLU-RAY PLASMA LCD LED 3DTV

GRRRR!

Werewolves
burst out
on Blu-ray!
p30



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freesat HD

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Tel: 020 7042 4530 Fax: 020 7042 4539

EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief Steve May
Editor Chris Jenkins
News Editor Anton van Beek
Production Editor Mark Craven
Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS

Tekura Maeva, Richard Stevenson, John Archer, Barry Fox,
Adam Rayner, Adrian Justins, Jim Hill, Martin Pipe, Danny
Phillips, Ian Campbell, Gareth Mason

Photography Rob Monk, Kevin Nixon, Will Ireland
Creative Director Robin Abbott
Editorial Director Jim Douglas

ADVERTISING

Advertising Director Rob Elms 020 7042 4272
Advertising Manager Joe Dovelton 020 7042 4256
Senior Sales Executive Julian Tozer 020 7042 4273
Sales Executive Tony Martin 020 7042 4255
Advertising Fax 020 7042 4159
London Sales Director Malcolm Stoodley
Ad Director Central Sales Jude Daniels 020 7042 4105
Commercial Development Manager, Future 360
Luke Bilton, 0207 0424112 Nortcliffe 020 7042 4153

MARKETING

Brand Marketing Manager Libby Brook

CIRCULATION

Trade Marketing Director Rachel Cock

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Production Managers Ralph Stringer, Roberta Lealand
Head of Production Richard Mason
Image manipulation James Wootton, Thadd Hendrickse,
Steven Wood
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Lewis (www.johnlewis.com)

LICENSING

Head of International Licensing
Tim Hudson, thudson@futurenet.co.uk
Tel: + 44 (0)1225 442244 Fax: + 44 (0)1225 732275

FUTURE PUBLISHING LIMITED

Group Publisher Pat Eggington
Publishing Director Stuart Anderton
Chief Operating Officer Simon Wear
Chief Executive Robert Price

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Stunning
cinemas,
p36

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With more and more Freeview HD boxes hitting shelves every month, we've put four of the latest models head-to-head to find out which deserves a place in your home cinema...

Icecrypt T2200
Humax HD-FOX T2
Metronic T2 HD
Goodmans GDB300HD



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Our guarantee to you:

Equipment reviewed in *Home Cinema Choice* is measured and quantified by Future Tech Labs, which for more than 15 years has set the standard for independent AV test & measurement. The findings of the Tech Labs are used to underpin the subjective opinions of our Reviews team, ensuring that you receive the best possible advice when it comes to planning your next purchase



CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Adam Rayner:
The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Jim Hill:
Apple fanatic Hill is the former editor of *T3 Home* and a *What Hi-Fi* escapee



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal *ERT*



Danny Phillips:
Former Editor of *What Video & High-Definition TV* and dedicated AV boffin



Barry Fox:
A veteran commentator on consumer electronics in mags such as *New Scientist*



Adrian Justins:
Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*



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Transform your home cinema with this remarkable new high-contrast projection screen

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Prepare to feel the earth move under your feet with the world's most powerful active subwoofer

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Pairing a multimedia-friendly BD player with 5.1 lifestyle speakers, is this all-in-one system a match made in heaven?

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Already popular in the US, the Canadian AV brand has its sights set on the UK with this premium-quality Blu-ray player

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BULLETIN

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3D GLASSES Can different brands' specs be made to co-operate? **PROJECTOR REVAMPED**
JVC tweaks its flagship D-ILA PJ **PSYCHO** Hitchcock horror hits hi-def **PIONEER** Japanese brand
unveils new Blu-ray components **DEMO'D** One-stop guide to the AV highlights of *Avatar*



Flower power

BeoLab 11 → www.bang-olufsen.co.uk

A passion for thumping bass is rarely combined with an appreciation of floral beauty, but Bang & Olufsen thinks different – its BeoLab 11 subwoofer is designed to look like a tulip, apparently.

This £1,500 aluminium cabinet, which can even be wall-mounted if you want to show off its startling design, uses two 6.5in drivers powered by an ICE 200W amp, and comes in various colour options including, silver, black, gold and red.

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Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

Infinia and beyond...

LG LX9900 → www.lg.com/uk



Having already conquered the pub sector with its passive 3D screens, LG is now looking to the consumer market with its Full HD 3D Active Shutter technology. Taking centre stage is the stunning LX9900, available in both 47in and 55in sizes (priced £2,500-£3,000 and £3,600-£4,000 respectively), which uses the company's ultra slim Infinia design. As well as supporting Full HD 3D playback, the LX9900 also offers integrated Freeview HD, TruMotion 400Hz, and LG's Netcast internet TV technology.

Partner with...

Kudos X2

Baby floorstanding speakers, £1,350
Kudos' diminutive floorstanders are less than a metre tall, but still aim to deliver big audio, thanks to their UK-made HDF high-quality cabinet and two-way driver array (a 1in fabric dome tweeter and 6in paper cone mid-range), developed by Norwegian specialists SEAS. Seven different finishes are available, including cherry (pictured), so you should have no trouble finding one to suit your tastes.
www.kudosaudio.com



Blu-ray bonanza



Pioneer has two new BD decks coming to the UK, the top-of-the-range BDP-LX53 and

cut-down BDP-330. Both feature network functionality including YouTube browsing and RSS feeds, iControlAV navigation for iPhone/iPod Touch and the company's PQLS jitter-reduction tech that can now handle bitstream audio over HDMI. The LX53 also offers gold-plated terminals and layered chassis armour and a drive stabiliser to reduce vibration. They'll arrive in the coming months, pricing TBC. www.pioneer.co.uk

Budget 3D thrills



Two 3D-friendly budget receivers will be on sale this July from Denon. The £450, 7-channel

AVR-1911 and 5-channel, £350 AVR-1611 come with full 3D video connectivity and 3D surround sound options, along with HDMI v1.4a. The HDMI connection allows an Audio Return Channel (ARC) for one cable communication.

Both support Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio, and Pro-Logic IIz. The AVR-1911 offers 1080p conversion and a front-panel USB with iPod and iPhone Digital Direct playback. www.denon.co.uk

Small wonder



Crystal Audio claims to be bringing us the most competitively priced THX Ultra 2 speaker package in

the world – the TX-2 5.1.

Costing around £1,400, it combines TX-T2SE floorstanders – thought to be the smallest of their kind – with 91dB sensitivity, 25mm tweeters, and twin 16.5cm drivers. Along with the THX-Center, and the bi-polar THX-D rears, is a 200W active subwoofer.

All the speakers come with gold-plated bi-wireable terminals for that extra touch of class. www.crystallaudiovideo.com

Best Buy has big UK plans

US retail giant targets home entertainment market

US retail giant Best Buy has dramatically arrived in the UK with a flagship store and an aggressive pricing policy on consumer electronics.

The 50,000 sq. ft. megastore at West Thurrock Retail Park, Grays, boasts a range including home cinema hardware and software, plus white goods, computers, cameras and games. There's also a GreenTech section dedicated to eco-friendly products, ranging from solar phone chargers to an £87,000 electric sports car.

The home cinema section is extensive, combining everyday brands such as Sony, LG and Samsung with high-end favourites including Arcam, Denon, and Loewe. Perhaps in contrast to the average high street store, Best Buy features separate home cinema and hi-fi demo rooms. The gaming section also has an HD demo room for showing off 15- and 18-certificate games.

Enthusiasts will welcome the sight of numerous flatscreens and mobile devices being



General manager of Best Buy's new West Thurrock megastore, Kam Prajapati

used to demonstrate the latest technological developments such as Sky Player, Freeview HD, Freesat and internet video, while

3D gets a dedicated room, too.

Software isn't neglected, either, with 3,500 DVDs and Blu-rays (equally split between the two formats) on offer.

Kam Prajapati, general manager and self-confessed home cinema enthusiast, told us: 'No other UK electrical retailer takes packaged media seriously. Blu-ray discs are heavily promoted throughout the DVD disc aisles and with the home cinema hardware. Some of Best Buy's initiatives include a trade-in scheme, local price matching, one-to-one training sessions for customers and 'Walk Out Working', whereby purchases such as phones and laptops are fully configured. There's even an App bar for loading iPods and Android mobiles with apps'.

Each section is staffed by Blue Shirt sales staff who get nine weeks training at the 'Best Buy academy'. Prajapati says: 'We've created a new breed of technology experts who are focused on customer service.'

A separate team of support technicians (Geek Squad) is on hand to resolve problems, including home visits to setup kit or advise on potential purchasing decisions. More complex systems and higher budgets are channelled into the hands of CEDIA-accredited custom install specialist SMC.

Best Buy has ran an aggressive ad campaign, challenging competitors like Currys to match its prices on home entertainment products. It's also developing a website at www.bestbuy.co.uk, and has plans to open 80 stores in the UK by 2013.

Our kinda place:
Best Buy is serious about home cinema



Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month



1 Screen Legends (Sky Movies HD)

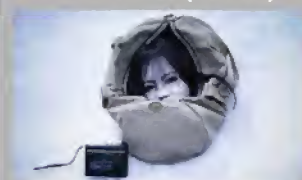
This festival of classics, all remastered in hi-def, has been a real treat for film fans. *Cleopatra*, *Ben Hur*, *The Great Escape*... Sheer genius! *SM*

2 Les chevaliers du Ciel (French import R2 DVD)



Superb six-DVD set of cult French TV series, shown in the UK as *The Aeronauts* back in 1967 – that dates me, then. *CJ*

3 Ju-On White Ghost/Black Ghost (R2 DVD)



Made to celebrate the popular J-horror franchise's 10th anniversary, this double-bill of freaky, supernatural shenanigans delivers plenty of chills. *CJ*

4 Rambo (All-region BD)



Still waiting for *The Expendables* this Summer, so my Sly back catalogue is being called back into active service. *MC*

5 Elvis (R1 DVD)



Ah, the final piece in my John Carpenter collection. There's no chat-track from the director, but in every other respect this disc hits all the right notes. *AvB*

Demo'd!

The AV highlights of...
Avatar on Blu-ray

Jungle book



24.00: Jake finally pays a visit to the lush jungles of Pandora and the AVC 1.78:1 visuals make the leap from 'merely' brilliant to jaw-droppingly fantastic.

Close encounters



28.52: A close encounter with one of Pandora's deadliest predators gives the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix a chance to cut loose.

Carry on screaming



71.30: Jake's first Banshee ride provides an ample opportunity for the lossless audio to showcase its more nuanced side – and it looks fantastic as well.

The army game



100.25: Big bass and terrific spatial FX are the order of the day as the Earth military begins its assault on the Na'vi Hometree.

Clash of the titans



133.01: For reference quality AV, look no further than this climactic 17-min sci-fi scrap between humanity and the Na'vi.

Remasters of War

Seminal '70s documentary series gets an expensive HD upgrade

Studios are still struggling when it comes to generating interest – and significant sales – for catalogue titles on Blu-ray (see p17) – making the news that FremantleMedia is spending a 'sizeable' amount of money remastering the BAFTA award-winning 1973 documentary series *The World at War* for a Blu-ray release later this year all the more surprising.

All 26 episodes of the series have been completely cleaned, re-graded and restored – a huge undertaking that involved making an estimated 3.6million fixes, in the region of 140,000 per episode. And while an automated Snell Archangel HD system (one of only two in the world) was used for first passes in the restoration process, according to Christos Glaridis, Director of Eyeframe – the London-based restoration and disc-authoring facility handling the monumental project – it only 'takes away about 70 to 80 per cent of the bigger

marks, tram lines and the like'. After this, each sequence was then further restored by hand to 'remove smaller dots and bits of damage'.

The restoration was only part of the process of bringing the series to Blu-ray – just as important was the actual AV presentation. On the audio side, the disc includes both an uncompressed stereo mix and a brand-new DTS-HD MA 5.1 track, while the



Christo Glaridis is the director of restoration/authoring house Eyeframe

original 4:3 visuals – somewhat controversially – have been cropped to 16:9. As Fremantle's Anthony Thomas revealed,

this was the result of not only numerous comparative tests, but also commercial pressures such as the fact that when it comes to worldwide broadcast rights, 'there simply aren't any HD TV channels that are willing to consider 4:3 material'.

While purists will undoubtedly moan, the new framing has the approval of series' producer Jeremy Isaacs and supervising editor Alan Afriat. And as Glaridis is keen to point out, 'back when this material was shot, there weren't many rules with framing anyway. So while some people

might look at the 16:9 version and think that it's cropping a little head and that, if you did go back and compare it's really not far off from the original'.

The restored DVD and Blu-ray releases of *The World at War* are scheduled for release this September, priced around £80 and £100 respectively.

War craft: Fremantle's Anthony Thomas (top) is justifiably proud of his company's new-look *The World at War* Blu-ray (bottom)



New Ultimatum



British speaker manufacturer Neat Acoustics has unveiled a new top-end model,

the Ultimatum XL6. Due to arrive in September, priced around £6,750 per pair, the XL6 is the first new model in the Ultimatum range for six years and is described as 'a multi-chamber, multi-facet loudspeaker incorporating six drive units per enclosure.'

The 1m tall cabinet houses two 168mcm bass units hidden away in an isobaric chamber that underpins the main 168mm mid/bass driver with an aluminium phase plug.

www.neat.co.uk

Hi-def Hitchcock



Universal Studios has announced it will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Alfred Hitchcock's classic

chiller *Psycho* with a Blu-ray release.

Due for a UK release on August 2, the BD50 will feature a 'meticulously restored' transfer, original mono audio plus a newly-created DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, and a host of extras including a commentary, feature-length *Making of...* doc, newsreel footage, a look at Hitchcock's influence on other filmmakers, Saul Bass' storyboards for the shower scene, on-set photos and much more. www.universalpictures.co.uk

Project & survive



JVC's DLA-HD990 projector is effectively a 'tweaked' version of the highly-regarded DLA-HD950.

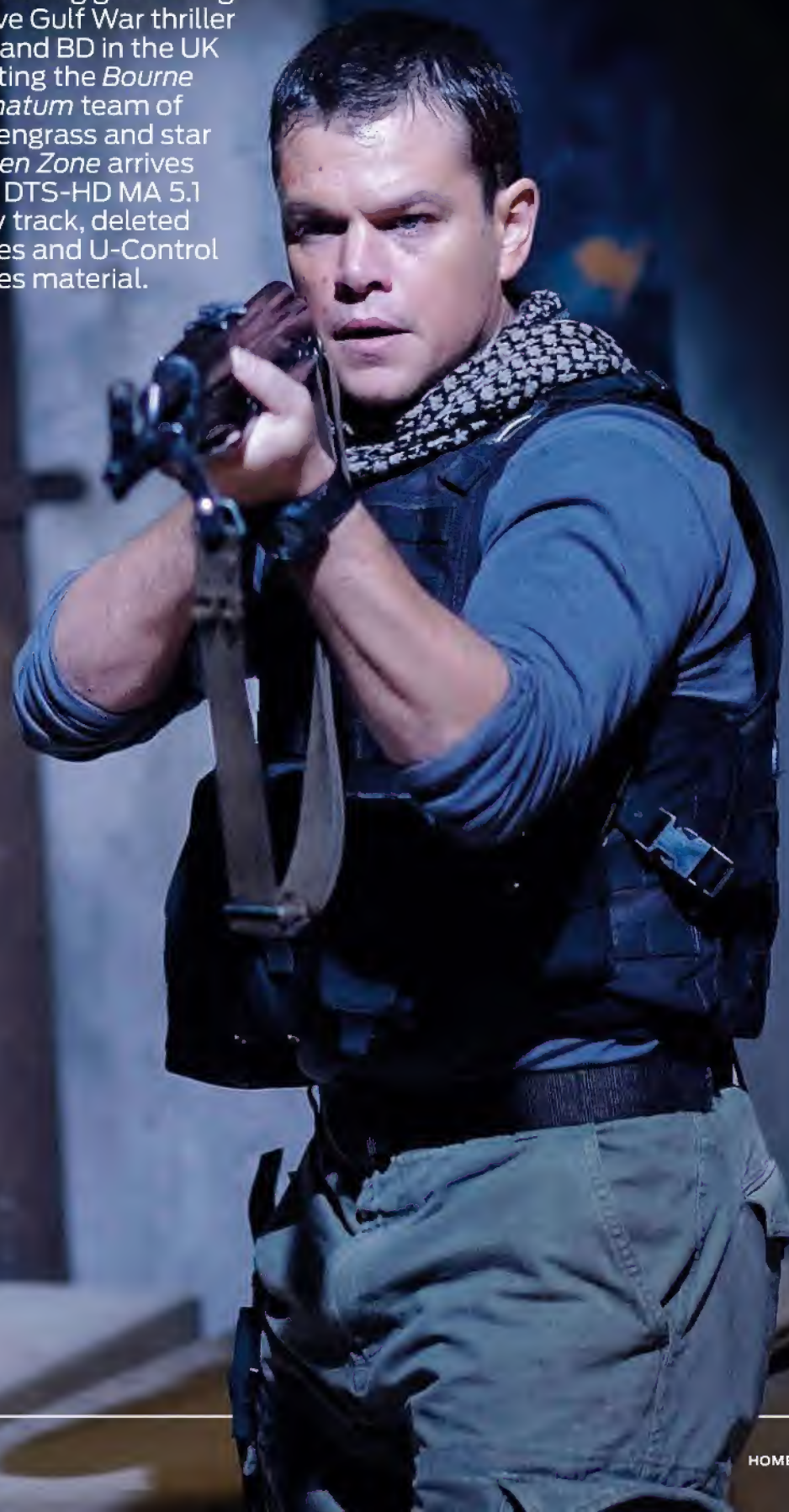
This new range-topper is built around selected components that performed best during testing. As a result, the native contrast ratio has been upped from the 950's 50,000:1 to 70,000:1. Brightness is, however, unchanged at 900 lumens.

Also inherited from the 950 is an impressive range of features that include ISF certification, Clear Motion Drive processing, an unobtrusive 19dB of fan noise and 1080p/24 capability. www.jvc.co.uk

In the zone

Green Zone → Universal Pictures → R2 DVD & All-region Blu-ray

It didn't light up the cinema box office, but we're still expecting great things from this explosive Gulf War thriller when it hits DVD and BD in the UK on July 12. Re-uniting the *Bourne Supremacy/Ultimatum* team of director Paul Greengrass and star Matt Damon, *Green Zone* arrives on Blu-ray with a DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, commentary track, deleted scenes, featurettes and U-Control behind-the-scenes material.



Pick'n'Mix

Filmmaker
Stuart
Hazeldine
picks his
five
favourite DVDs...



1 The Lord of the Rings: Extended Editions

The first set of DVDs you can watch like you're reading the chapters of a book. The boxes even look like book jackets on your shelf. Perfection.

2 Alien Quadrilogy

Alien was the film that made me want to make films. If only they could un-make the fourth one...

3 Blade Runner: The Final Cut

The other film that made me want to make films. Ridley Scott has a lot to answer for!

4 The Godfather Trilogy

The Daddy times two. And Part Three's okay.

5 Amadeus

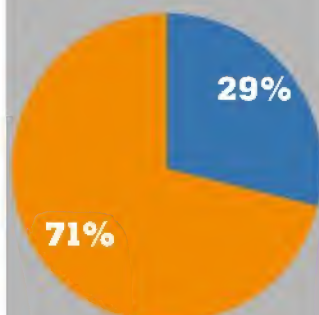
The best film ever made about the joy of the creative impulse versus the unfairness of life.

Since selling his first screenplay aged 24, Stuart Hazeldine has done rewrites on sci-fi hits *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Knowing*, and is adapting *The Tripods* for director Alex Proyas. His directorial debut *Exam* is available to buy on DVD/Blu-ray from June 7, courtesy of Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

We asked...

Which of the following do you think is the more important TV tech?

- Integrated IPTV functionality
- Full HD 3D compatibility



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Upside down world of 3D

Samsung offers hope for a standardisation of 3D glasses

The incompatibility of 3D glasses between TV brands is seen as a significant stumbling block in the take-up of domestic 3D. Not being able to take your own 3D spec around to watch sports or a movie with a friend who has a different brand of 3DTV makes little sense to anyone. HCC, though, has discovered a workaround. Sort of.

Despite the standards for Full HD 3D being rigorously defined and agreed during 2009, seemingly everyone forgot to mandate a uniform standard for Active Shutter glasses. Yet we've found that while Samsung and Panasonic glasses are officially incompatible, that if you wear one pair upside down they will work with the rival brand's set. We successfully enjoyed 3DTV on a Panasonic model with upside-down Samsung glasses, and vice versa. Admittedly, it wasn't a very comfortable experience, and you do look stupider than normal trying it, but heck, this is what we've all been reduced to...

Samsung R&D chief Simon Lee confirmed the bizarre fact, explaining that the implementation of polarising lenses in the eyewear has been reversed by the two brands. Thankfully, there may be a more sensible solution pending: 'I think it's likely that different manufacturers will come together, possibly as early as next year, to agree a common standard for Active Shutter glasses,' Lee revealed.

3D not (very) bad for health

HCC's experiment took place during an exclusive technical briefing at Samsung's London HQ, where we also raised the issue of 3D effects on health. Have initial warnings from the brand that pregnant, epileptic, elderly, physically afflicted, nervous or under sixes should avoid 3DTV had a negative impact on the technology?

'The warnings were produced by a different department within Samsung and I think they may be a little too scary,' admitted Lee. 'We're looking at modifying the warning labels. Of course, as a manufacturer we must always act responsibly when introducing new technology.'

Health warnings aside, the Samsung 3DTV team revealed



Beauty and the Beast: Samsung has exclusive rights to bundle *Shrek* 3D Blu-rays with its TVs

that while the effectiveness and impact of 3DTV is largely governed by the size of the screen, they were looking to introduce 32- and 37in models during 2010. 'It's all about the availability of 200Hz panels in the smaller sizes,' we were told.

In the week before the tech briefing, Samsung pulled out all the stops to promote its 3DTVs to the public, hosting a lavish, star-studded launch party for its new flagship LED 9000 (pictured) series at London's prestigious Saatchi Gallery.

Naturally HCC was there, alongside celebrities and moviemakers including Kevin Spacey, Bill Nighy and Claudia Winkleman.

'I think kids are going to love 3D,' *Pirates of the Caribbean* star Nighy told HCC. 'I'm not working on a 3D project at the moment but I recently did [the 3D animation] *G-Force* with Jerry Bruckheimer. When I watched it in a theatre with a 1,000 kids they loved the experience.'

Dr Who favourite Noel Clarke told HCC that as

an avid gamer he expected the console industry rather than movies to really propel 3D forward in the home. 'With spectacular games like *Call Of Duty* it'll be great,' he declared. 'Gamers are going to love the experience and they'll have no problems wearing the glasses.'

Turn up: HCC's Jim Hill looks happy to be an upside down 3D glasses guinea pig



This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

1 Parallax view

Toshiba has developed a 21in autostereoscopic HD display for use in next-gen 3D monitors.

Boasting a 1280 x 800 WXGA resolution, the display employs an 'integral imaging system' to reproduce a 3D image that can be viewed without glasses. It also features a multi-parallax design that results in images that change perspective depending on the viewer's position. Clever!



2 Scott can set you free

Philips has launched a global promotional campaign in association with Ridley Scott Associates (RSA) aiming to demonstrate the 'cinematic capabilities' of the company's TVs. The campaign includes a competition offering budding filmmakers the chance to produce their own short. The comp will be judged by Ridley Scott, in association with BAFTA, with the winner getting a week's work experience at RSA offices in LA, New York or London. For more info visit www.philips.com/cinema.

3 3D goes up in smoke

Panasonic's first foray into 3DTV has hit a bit of an ash cloud-shaped snag. The ongoing air freight problems caused by the eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano left the company struggling to replenish stock in the UK after initial shipments sold out. 'Supplies could remain short at least until July,' Panasonic's Fabrice Estornel told HCC.

4 Another TV revolution!

Intel CEO Paul Otellini is expecting big things in the future from web-based TVs – specifically those that will be powered by the next-generation of his company's Atom processors – claiming that 'the TV revolution we are about to go through is the biggest change since the move to colour.' Intel senior vice president Eric Kim evidently concurs, stating, 'A year from now, TV will have been reinvented.'

5 Ready, net, go

Virgin Media has launched its first online movie service, dubbed Virgin Media Online Movies (catchy). The service, which doesn't require you to be a Virgin Media customer, allows users to stream films from a library of hundreds of titles directly to laptops, PCs and TVs. All rentals will offer unlimited views for a 48-hour period, and the films can be watched where ever the account holder logs on.

6 'Why did I buy this?'

According to research undertaken by consumer review website Reevo.com, nearly a third of UK shoppers have bought an electrical item which then regretted purchasing due to spending too little time researching it. They should've bought a copy of HCC...

7 Blu fever breaks out

Avatar continues to break records around the world following its recent release on DVD and Blu-ray. The title reportedly sold over 6.2million copies worldwide in its first three weeks on shelves, and here in the UK it quickly became the biggest-selling Blu-ray title to date with two-week sales reaching 505,057 units, beating the previous all-time Blu-ray record of 490,633 held by *The Dark Knight*.

8 Turning Japanese

Despite its success in Europe and the US, LG Electronics has never managed to find significant retail exposure in Japan. However, that could all be about to change, with a report in *Nikkei Business Daily* claiming that LG could stage a full-scale TV invasion of Japan as early as this Autumn, following talks between the Korean brand and Japanese retailers.

9 Telly addicts

The flat TV market appears to be bouncing back to life. Sharp has announced that it will double the current production capacity at its new LCD manufacturing plant in Sakai City, Osaka from July. New data on the Japanese market suggests that TV shipments have leapt 120 per cent year-on-year.

10 Why are we waiting?

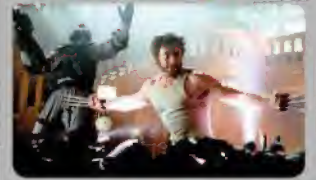
Despite having released its first Freeview HD set-top box (the £160 Pace-designed DTR5520), Philips has now revealed that none of its 2010 TV range will pack Freeview HD tuners – saving them for its 2011 lineup instead. Instead the brand promises a 'competitive bundle' with its TVs and a set-top box. Hmmmm.



Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

X marks the spot



Following their success with *Kick-Ass*, it's been confirmed that director Matthew Vaughn and collaborator Jane Goldman are working on the *X-Men: First Class* movie due to hit cinemas on June 3, 2011. Vaughn was attached to earlier Marvel adaptations *X-Men 3* and *Thor* in the past, only to leave both projects.

Dredd again

The long-rumoured *Judge Dredd* reboot seems to be gaining momentum following the news that India-based Reliance Big Entertainment and IM Global will finance a \$50million (possibly 3D) flick. *Vantage Point* director Pete Travis is attached.

Once bitten

In the oddest bit of casting news this year, it's being reported that Colin Farrell has joined the cast of the *Fright Night* remake, taking the lead vampire role previously played by Chris Sarandon. Suddenly this film is sounding altogether more interesting than we ever expected.

A Hard Day's Fright

More oddball movie news – a US production company has optioned the rights to a novel called *Paul is Dead*. This horror spoof re-imagines the history of The Beatles, only now John, Paul, George and Ringo are all zombies.

Die Hardest



The *A-Team* screenwriter Skip Woods is in negotiations with 20th Century Fox to knock together a script for a fifth *Die Hard* movie. There are no story details yet, but hopefully there won't be the PG-13 restrictions that somewhat ruined the last film in the series.



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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson wants to go back to having multiple subwoofers in his listening room – and is contemplating the ultimate sacrifice...

Floyd E. Toole ate my hamster. Well, to be precise Mr Toole's erudite words have plunged me into a financial conundrum that means the hamster might just be next Sunday's roast dinner. Why? Because after reading his excellent tome *Sound Reproduction: Loudspeakers and Rooms*, I have installed a second subwoofer and am working out how to afford numbers three and four. As these are Velodyne DD18s, one can appreciate the fiscal hyper-tension this is causing.

If you don't own Mr Toole's book you should. It's informative, witty, easy-to-read (even if you only have a basic grasp of acoustics), and probably the most definitive work on surround sound loudspeakers yet produced. I know of at least four speaker brands that use Toole's research as a fundamental part of the design process.

The section of this book currently endangering my hamster is the one on bass, and how subwoofers interact with the room. To cut a long and involved technical thesis down to a sentence – you need four identical subs placed in each corner of the room to produce the tightest, loudest and most even bass across all listening positions.

Being a recovering sub-a-holic (I once had ten), I've tried this setup before but it didn't really work in my room. The subs I used were not identical, causing pressure differences that upset the harmony of the LFE system, and I'd neglected to read the chapter on seating position, which states the absolute worst place to sit for bass response is about 25 per cent of the room's length away from the rear wall. Which is where I was. D'oh.

The eureka moment that may well see NatWest debate another sub-prime loan didn't take place at my home. It came during a visit to a UK loudspeaker manufacturer (i.e. not Velodyne) for whom I consult. With a few hours to spare, a purpose-built listening room to hand and access to a warehouse full of speakers and subs, we decided to put Toole's subwoofering ideals to the test.

The room is large and well-damped and needs a lot of LF energy to fill, so it wasn't a great surprise that one 15in sub driven by an 800W off-board amplifier struggled to wobble one's gizzards in a convincing sort of fashion. Two made a big difference, especially in corner placement rather than mid wall. Even after re-balancing levels, the bass wasn't just bigger, it was tighter and deeper, too. There was still quite a narrow sweet spot for best sound, though.

Adding two more subs at the rear of the room was a revelation. Coffees were dropped in awe and weary listeners sat up and took note. The bottom-end LFE and processor-managed channel bass came across with immense authority and ultra-fast transient attack. Mid-wall placement was the most articulate, particularly with multichannel music, but **corner positions added a huge scale and headroom to movies**. In either configuration listeners in any of the room's 16 seats were well catered for – and this subjective finding was born out across some basic bass SPL measurement, too.

Back at home, the two subs are working spectacularly well. The DD18s have the advantage of an on-board EQ system that allows for manual tweaking of the response. Theoretically, one should be able to get each of the four subs producing almost exactly the same perceived output at the listening position even in non-symmetrical rooms. Better news still is that several AVRs now have independent EQ for two or three sub channels, so it might even be possible to get close to this set-up with standard (non-EQ) active subs. My trouble is that my experience in the manufacturer's listening room rather indicates that the 'full Toole' of four subs is going to be seriously good at home. I just hope I can convince the wife, and the hamster ●

Have you experimented with more than one subwoofer?
Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com

Just to clarify, Richard Stevenson is not actually going to cook and eat his pet hamster. He's got a dozen rabbits to munch on first.

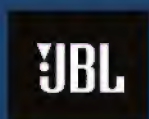




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DVD ADDICT

The prospect of more classic films appearing on Blu-ray has got **The Beek** all hot under the collar. And he wants you to be excited, too

Good news everybody! This month I've decided to take time off from moaning about 3D to talk about something else close to my heart. As avid readers of this column (if they exist) will undoubtedly be aware, I have a real passion for 'classic' cinema – the kind of films made in the days when everybody smoked, men always wore hats and telephone exchanges were populated exclusively by impeccably-groomed young ladies on rollerskates.

Anyway, a little over six months ago I wrote about Eureka's Blu-ray release of FW Murnau's 1927 *Sunrise*, how brilliant the disc was and how I thought that the format's 'brightest future resides in cinema's past' (kind of snappy, dontcha think?). Since that column we've been lucky enough to see the likes of *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *M* and *Doctor Zhivago* all make the jump to Blu-ray, and they've all be marvellous. But, as impressive as these titles have been, it looks like there are even bigger and better things in the works for later this year and beyond.

HD Harryhausen

While Sony Pictures is still taking its time bringing *Lawrence of Arabia* to Blu-ray (I have a feeling we might see it in 2012 – the film's 50th anniversary) the company has at least dug into its archives and is preparing to unleash *Jason and the Argonauts* in hi-def in the US this Summer. While I have a feeling that the 1080p transfer will suffer from the same unavoidable optical issues that hit Warner Home Video's recent *Clash of the Titans* disc (see p100), I'm still excited about watching Ray Harryhausen's stop-motion skeletons in Full HD.

But even that pales into insignificance next to the info slowly leaking out of Warner these days. First up came the listing on UK web retailers for a Blu-ray edition of *Forbidden Planet*, which will

apparently hit as part of a wave of sci-fi movies this September. Then came the screening of a new digital restoration of the 1933 version of *King Kong* at the TCM Classic Film Festival in LA, where film critic Leonard Maltin revealed that this restoration will 'yield a Blu-ray home video release later this year'. Let's hope that UK rights-holder Universal secures access to all of the assets for this release. But if not, the Warner disc is pretty much guaranteed to be region-free, so importing that shouldn't be a problem.

Then, just as I was getting over the shock of the *Kong* news came an official announcement from the US arm of Warner that the company is putting the *Citizen Kane* and *Ben-Hur* DVDs on moratorium while both titles undergo restorations in preparation for new DVD and Blu-ray editions. The only downside is the fact that we're going to have to wait until 2011 to see them both.

Add to this Eureka Entertainment's confirmation of a restored and reconstructed Blu-ray Director's Cut of Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi classic *Metropolis* later this year, and you can see why I'm over the moon with what the future has to hold for my Blu-ray collection.

But just as every cloud has a silver lining, so the opposite still seems to apply. Despite all of the good news I've just reeled off, from my chats with various insiders, studios are still extremely cautious about spending large amounts of money on these HD editions of classic films. The truth is that those released aren't selling well – certainly not at the level that they ever performed on DVD. That's a shame, because done correctly, these films look better than ever on Blu, and that's a message that still doesn't seem to be getting out to everyone. So, consider yourself informed ●

Are you excited about classic movies being released on Blu-ray? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.co.uk

Anton van Beek once tried wearing rollerskates in the HCC office. After he'd done £13,000 of damage, we asked him to stop



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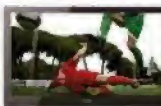
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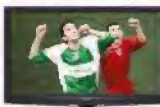
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TECH TANTRUM

Hi-def signals without wires, and the uncertainty of a three-dimensional future, are currently tickling the grey cells of **Barry Fox**

For my six-month guest column stint in *HCC* I've tried to dig out some of the hard facts that you won't find in the 'it's pink and shiny' lads'-mag gadget reviews. This ain't easy because pitifully few product managers and PR people have a clue what's under their bonnets.

Sony Ericsson recently showed how its new Xperia X10 phones can download music from SE's Play Now site. The demonstrator didn't know, or seem to care, about the coding standard, bit-rate, or DRM copy-protection, and why downloads cost a sky-high £1 per track. I later found out that the Dick Turpin price is because the download is billed as a premium-rate text message.

So be warned; and here are a few advance pointers on hot topics soon coming to the boil.

Cable-free HD

Sony and Panasonic have been discussing the possibility of Full HD by Wi-Fi as a welcome way to send HDTV across a room or around the house without spending a fortune on long HDMI cables. Samsung has been promising – but not yet demonstrating – a Full HD camcorder which connects to an HDTV by Wi-Fi.

Be aware that the hi-def Wi-Fi connection must use the new 802.11n standard, which is incompatible with most existing Wi-Fi gear. Also, there will very likely be no direct Wi-Fi connection between a Blu-ray player and a TV. The wireless link will be between the player and a computer server, and between the server and TV. **Which is far more complicated and likely to fail than if you were just using an HDMI cable.**

Wireless connection direct from a BD player to TV will be better done by the completely different SiBeam Wireless HD system. This uses much higher frequencies than Wi-Fi (in the 60GHz radar band), will probably cost more than an HDMI cable, and won't go through thick walls. Hmmm.

The other hot topic is, of course, 3D. Using a 'Full HD to each eye' Active Shutter 3DTV from Panasonic or Sony to watch Sky's 'half HD to each eye' 3D broadcasts should work, albeit with the need to root around the onscreen menus for the correct 'side-by-side' setting. But half-HD passive polarisation TVs from JVC, Hyundai and LG – designed for broadcast 3D – are unlikely to cope with Full HD 3D Blu-ray movies or games.

LG is supplying many thousands of these 3D sets to pubs for Sky's 3D sports broadcasts; and still stubbornly ducking my question about compatibility with Blu-ray 3D – draw your own conclusions.

Of course, 3D coverage of the FIFA 2010 World Cup will be beamed out of South Africa, and soccer fans may think this a very good reason to buy a 3DTV.

Indeed, Sony says: 'Complementing the 3D live broadcasts and a series of public viewing opportunities around the world, the general public will also be able to enjoy the 3D promotional trailers for each of the 25 games, shown in around 1,300 Sony-affiliated retail stores and flagship stores throughout Europe.'

But Niclas Ericson of FIFA admits that although broadcasters in the US and Spain will transmit games in 3D, the BBC and ITV have exclusive rights in the UK, and will offer 2D only. Technically Sky could broadcast the World Cup in 3D, but it doesn't have World Cup rights.

Could there be a 3D deal between the BBC/ITV and Sky to broadcast games in 3D here? Unlikely. The BBC, ITV and Sky are equal shareholders in Freeview, and Freeview is currently shafting Sky by promoting Freeview HD as a cheaper way to watch the cup games in HD than Sky HD. The BBC, ITV, and Sky are not in any mood to do each other favours.

For more of Barry Fox's columns head over to our website: www.homecinemachoice.com

Tech guru **Barry Fox** hasn't smiled since 1997, when he discovered a Scart cable in the back of his sock drawer



Tech diary

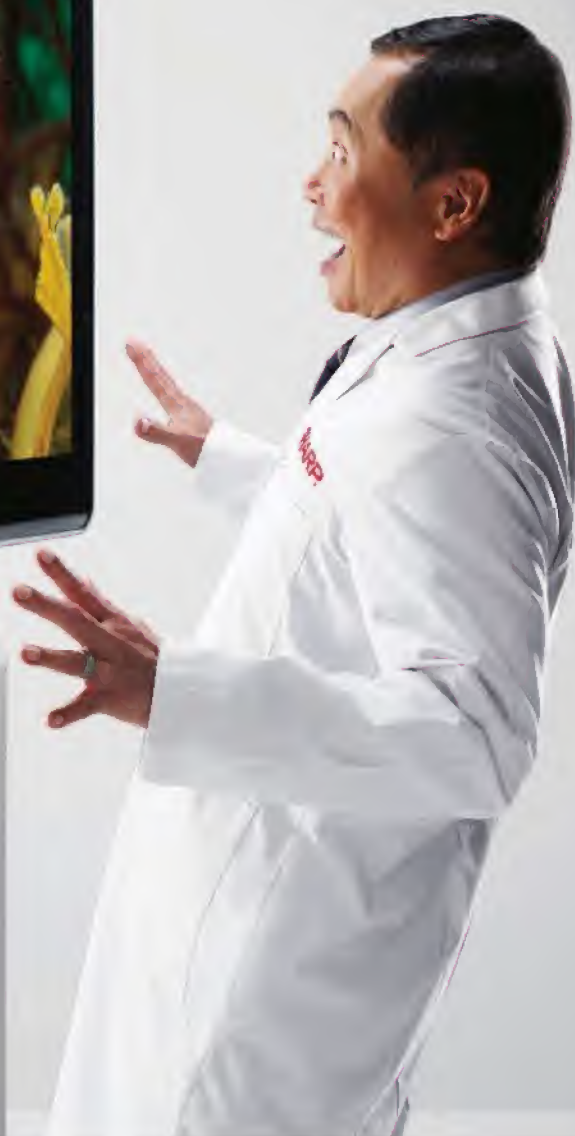
The world of AV and film changes fast. **Our calendar** means you don't miss out

Solomon Kane:
Coming your way
on Blu-ray June 28



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				<p>4 →</p> <p>Alice in Wonderland</p> <p>Tim Burton's fantasy hits DVD and 2D Blu-ray in the UK this Friday. Extras include featurettes on the Mad Hatter, Alice and the creatures of Underland. http://disney.go.com</p>		
<p>7 ↗</p> <p>Wolfman: Extended Cut</p> <p>The trend for remaking classic horrors continues with this troubled update of the legendary 1941 werewolf movie, which comes to DVD and BD in the UK today with 16 minutes of extra footage www.thewolfmanmovie.com</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Connections</p> <p>This three-day 'Digital Living Conference and Showcase' will address the future of digital entertainment when it kicks off today in Santa Clara, California www.connectionsus.com</p>	<p>9</p> <p>InfoComm 2010</p> <p>The Las Vegas Convention Center opens today to this forward-looking three-day pro-AV event dedicated to 'Tech, Trends and Training' www.infocommshow.org</p>	<p>10</p> <p>R.I.P</p> <p>Acting legend Spencer Tracy passed away on this date in 1967. Born in 1900, the US actor was best known for a run of nine hit films with Katherine Hepburn, with whom he had a relationship until his death</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Brooklyn's Finest</p> <p>This crime thriller from <i>Training Day</i> director Antoine Fuqua focuses on seven days in the lives of a trio of New York cops. Check it out at your local cinema from today www.brooklynsthfinestthemovie.com</p>		
<p>14</p> <p>War of the Worlds</p> <p>Steven Spielberg's 2005 update of HG Wells' classic gets its Blu-ray disc debut today courtesy of Paramount Home Entertainment www.waroftheworlds.com</p>	<p>15</p> <p>The Tech Home Event 2010</p> <p>CEDIA UK's trade-only smarthome event has a new name this year, but keeps its usual setting of the ICC London ExCel. www.hometechnologyevent.co.uk</p>			<p>18 ↖</p> <p>MacGruber</p> <p>Riffing on the '80s TV series <i>MacGyver</i>, this spoof finds ex-special op MacGruber brought out of retirement to defeat his arch-enemy Dieter Von Cunth. Hilarity will surely ensue! http://iamrogue.com/macgruber</p>	<p>19</p> <p>Happy Birthday</p> <p>Up and coming movie superstar Zoe Saldana turns 32 today. Having made a splash as Uhura in the <i>Star Trek</i> reboot, she's since played the female lead in <i>Avatar</i> and comic book adaptation <i>The Losers</i></p>	<p>20 ↓</p> <p>Jaws</p> <p>Steven Spielberg's aquatic shocker <i>Jaws</i> was released in cinemas across the US on this date in 1975. As well as being a superb film, it also established the idea of releasing a movie across hundreds of screens simultaneously</p>
<p>21 ↖</p> <p>The Princess and the Frog</p> <p>Disney jumped back into the world of 2D animation in 2009 with this fun flick. It makes its belated debut on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK this Monday http://disney.go.com/</p>			<p>24</p> <p>Yee-haw</p> <p>Cowboy hero Hopalong Cassidy made history as the eponymous star of the first Western TV series, which began broadcasting on NBC in the US on this date in 1949</p>	<p>25 ↓</p> <p>Get Him to the Greek</p> <p>This comedy flick unites genre stars Jonah Hill and Russell Brand as a record company intern and the out-of-control rock star he must take to an LA gig www.gethimtothegreek.net</p>		
<p>28</p> <p>Solomon Kane</p> <p>Fans of full-blooded action fantasy should seek out this debut movie outing for Conan-creator Robert E Howard's puritanical demon slayer. On DVD and BD in the UK from today www.solomonkanethemovie.com</p>			<p>1</p> <p>HCC #184</p> <p>Start saving now for <i>HCC</i> #184. Your favourite home cinema mag hits the stands this Thursday, packed with hardware tests, features, opinion and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com</p>			

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The sound of Synthesis



JBL Synthesis is a one-stop-shop for extraordinary home cinema audio. **Adam Rayner** investigates

Many years ago, I was lucky enough to get a demo of early JBL Synthesis technology. It was the era when the first *Jurassic Park* movie was all the rage, and I recall with great clarity just how excited JBL was about its £27,000 system. The PR man gleefully screened the sequence where the huge T-Rex skeleton falls out of the ceiling; there is this tiny moment when the bracket the skeleton is chained to snaps. He was as evangelically delighted by this absurd level of pin-sharp detail as I was, and when we met again recently for this exclusive audition of JBL

Synthesis' newest hardware, he was chuffed to find I recalled the *JP* clip some ten years later. Does that make us a pair of sad gits? Possibly...

For those who don't know, Synthesis is intended to be JBL's most 'signature' statement product line, and there's a large slice of Hollywood aristocracy that swears by it. The line comprises amplifiers, passive subwoofers, loudspeakers and a brace of processors, all arrayed into no fewer than nine ranges of kit. They vary in size, might and looks, but the whole lot can be married and blended range-from-range to fit with whatever



room size and channel set up your cinema requires. And the big deal is that **all the speakers are voice-matched to perfection** and have enough power handling to work with all the amplifiers.

Furthermore, all the systems are tuned by the Harman Audio Test System (HATS). Essentially, when you install a JBL Synthesis system, you also get the services of a JBL factory-trained technician to fine-tune the array to your room. This means that your system will be bespoke to you (as permutations and combinations are vast) but that the performance is guaranteed.

Scaleable systems

In a room at JBL's UK distributors CSE in York, HCC got to experience a £68,000 system (not counting the screen and projector), yet this was only part-way up the ladder. A Synthesis setup starts at around £35,000 and can be scaled until you have spent £210,000 at its priciest. What we heard was a front stage of Project Array 1400s for L&R, with a Project Array 880 centre channel and four Performance Series PT800 surface-mounted surround speakers.

There were also two 18in and two 15in passive subwoofers, run from full-sized rack amplification under the processors. That made it a 7.4 channel system, which, incidentally, provides enough THX-approved bass to make explosions visceral and the very concrete structure of the building at CSE shake under your feet to an estimated 2.6 on the Richter scale!

At the heart of these systems are the electronics. Our setup utilised JBL Synthesis' SDP-40HD processor, along with the two-box digital equaliser/crossover device called the SDEC 4500. Between them, and a serious eight-microphone auto-EQ software system with real power and excellent resolution, you get a magnificently accurate room correction, which makes this stuff sing.

Power came from three S820 stereo amps driven bridged into each of the three front enclosures at some 800W apiece, with two more S820s to give the subwoofers some grunt. Then, a six-channel S5165 amp was called upon to drive the four PT800s lining the rear and side walls.

Whereas the PT800s look kind of cute with their grilles off, revealing their inverted dome



A



B

A: A JBL Synthesis system is driven by the brand's own amps and processors, ensuring a perfect match of brains and brawn

B: The Project Array 1400 left/right speakers feature a distinctive horn that disperses HF effects from a 3in compression driver and 1in UHF compression driver

C: This setup houses the LCR enclosures behind the projector screen, and places a subwoofer in each corner of the room



C



D

Lovely JBL-y

Tracing the blue-blooded lineage of the first speaker used in film

Back in 1928, James B Lansing, who gave his initials to JBL loudspeakers, was the designer of the speaker used in Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, the very first 'talkie'. Since then, JBL has remained speaker royalty and its hardware used by all kinds of Hollywood luminaries both in production and in theatres.

What you might not know is that it's also so deeply ensconced within the Disney Theme Parks organisation that merely wearing a JBL T-shirt will get you treated as though you are a valued technician. In fact, the sound design used in Disney World is incredible, from the Parade soundtrack and the ambient music to the different sound systems on the rides.

But it is in movie houses and upon huge rock concert stages that the magic really happens, and JBL has been a leader in big, bad professional audio for an age. Its speakers may have begun as plain ugly boxes, but in time, pretty veneers and shiny finishes have been applied and the professional milieu tamed enough to make the big cat into, well not a kitten, but at least something that won't literally eat you alive...



D: The passive S1S-EX subwoofer packs a massive 18in cone underneath a threesome of ports. The £68,000 setup HCC auditioned uses two of 'em!
E: JBL Synthesis' PT800 surrounds are wall-mountable enclosures. Take the grille off to get a look at the three-way driver array



E



titanium cones, the sadly hidden-behind-the-screen Project Array enclosures are big, bad and purposeful-looking, with that typical professional audio feel of a gangster dressed up in a smart suit. The logo plate and the lustrous look are gorgeous, but they still appear dangerous, as do the plain rectangular subwoofers. These have large ports and ribbed paper cones in the front that seem a bit old school, but nowadays they have insane motors on their behinds.

Having been sensible and done all my note-taking first (just in case I came over all excited and useless once I'd had my demo) it was finally time to fire up some multichannel material. JBL chose a scene from Pixar's *Ratatouille* – the intro sequence with the old lady with the shotgun – which is probably what I'd have picked, too.

The first thing I noticed from the Synthesis setup was an incredibly taut yet unstrained snap and attacking front edge to all the bangs, crashes and tinkles of glass. Then there was its breathtaking dynamism (or ability to get suddenly louder) and absurd panache when resolving detail in the midst of mayhem. All things a home cinema system demands, in fact.

Then, when the sequence moves onto a sewer as the rats all escape, the watery noises and placement were mind-blowing – the sheer wetness of the effect had me ducking. It must be in the performance of the high reaching compression drivers, called Ultra High Frequency transducers, that makes this happen. All I know is it made every hair on my body stand up.

And as for the bass end of the system – well, it was stupefying.

Massive and effortless in scale, yet tight and visceral, so that the whole experience had the professional bent of a 'real' high-end commercial cinema, but different. That difference was that it was simply better...

Top of the pile

If you can afford one, a JBL Synthesis system is at the very top end of home cinema audio. The build, technology and level of service provided is first-rate, and the overall experience of hearing one of these setups in full flow is phenomenal. This isn't about bird song and tinkling streams – it's more soaring eagles' cries and thunderous waterfalls.



F: CSE's audition room features luxury seating and acoustic treatments to match the high-end hardware

G: With its grille in place, the surround speaker blends in seamlessly with the décor

→ Specifications

JBL Synthesis 1400 Project Array BG L/R (£4,250 each)

Drive units: 1 x JBL 14in bass; 1 x 3in compression driver; 1 x 1in compression driver

Enclosure: 3-way ported

Frequency response:

32Hz-40kHz

Sensitivity: 89dB

Power handling: 10-300W

Dimensions: 394(w) x 1181(h) x

483(d)mm

Weight: 52kg

Connections: Binding posts

JBL Synthesis 880 Project Array BG centre (£2,800)

Drive units: 2 x JBL 8in bass; 1 x 3in midrange; 1 x 1in compression driver

Enclosure: 3-way sealed

Frequency response:

70Hz-40kHz

Sensitivity: 90dB

Power handling: 10-200W

Dimensions: 730(w) x 311(h) x

279(d)mm

Weight: 21kg

Connections: Binding posts

JBL Synthesis PT800 Performance Series surrounds (£1,250 each)

Drive units: 1 x JBL 8in bass; 1 x 4in midrange; 1 x 1in tweeter

Enclosure: 3-way sealed

Frequency response:

80Hz-22kHz

Sensitivity: 91dB

Power handling: 50-250W

Dimensions: 343(w) x 610(h) x

152(d)mm

Weight: 17kg

Connections: Binding posts

JBL Synthesis S2S subwoofer (£1,400)

Drive units: 1 x 15in bass

Enclosure: Front-firing

quad-ported

Frequency response: 25-80Hz

Sensitivity: 94dB

Dimensions: 533(w) x 699(h) x

401(d)mm

Weight: 50kg

Connections: Binding posts

JBL Synthesis S1S-EX Everest subwoofer (£2,200)

Drive units: 1 x 18in bass

Enclosure: Front-firing triple

ported

Frequency response:

20Hz-200Hz

Sensitivity: 97dB

Dimensions: 533(w) x 876(h) x

559(d)mm

Weight: 58.6kg

Connections: Binding posts

Five x JBL S820 Amplifiers and 1 x S5165 Amplifier

SDP-40HD system processor

SDEC 4500 for digital EQ

and crossover

Cables by Straightwire



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The future of film

Hollywood believes 3D can deliver a cash and creativity boost. **Ian Campbell** reports

We see our world in three dimensions and should build our entertainment into that.' So says Buzz Hayes, a man who has produced seven of Sony's eight 3D pictures. 'We wake up and we see the world in 3D. I find it entirely ridiculous when people say it is a gimmick'.

Gimmick or not, 3D sceptics may have to eat some humble pie. There's growing evidence that an entertainment phenomenon fuelled by the spectacular success of *Avatar* is gaining real traction. By the end of the year, 7,000 3D cinemas worldwide will be ready to screen the 100 new 3D movies planned by 2012.

Adding further weight to the movement are big-name directors who want to follow the trail blazed by James Cameron – out next year is *The Adventures of Tintin*, Steven Spielberg's 3D debut, while Martin Scorsese has just put pen to paper to direct a kid's film, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*.

3D kings

In a screening room on the Columbia Studios film lot in Culver City, Buzz Hayes is talking to *HCC* in his new role as chairman of the Sony 3D Technology Centre, a very tangible manifestation of his belief that this is the future of cinema. Last issue (*HCC* #182) we profiled the centre that provides three-day courses on shooting 3D to film and TV professionals. The facility is not about Sony being benevolent. It's more of an opportunity to stake its claim as the 3D kings of Tinseltown.

3D, of course, is good news for companies like Sony. While on the Columbia lot, *HCC* also met Michael Lynton, chairman and chief executive of Sony Pictures, who described 3D as 'a blazing bright spot' for an industry anxious to resuscitate the home entertainment market. The fact that the format has so far eluded piracy is a big benefit, particularly at a time when illegal downloads are eating into DVD sales.

As you would expect from a studio executive, Lynton is interested in new ways that Hollywood



can make money as well as entertain, but he was also keen to talk up the creative possibilities. 'It's less about effects that jump out of the screen and grab you and more about creating an immersive experience. And it goes beyond animation and special effects movies.'

3D also goes beyond Hollywood. Sony plans to extend its training services to encompass medical imaging and other non-entertainment applications. But right now the onus is on helping film and broadcast professionals achieve the best possible results.

Software solution

The camera rig at Sony's 3D Technology Centre is built by 3ality, a digital film company that also makes the software that corrects aberrations which can occur in a potentially complex shooting situation. 'You build sophisticated cameras and rigs – but that will only get you a degree of accuracy. The algorithms in our software are what take you the rest of the way,' explains 3ality CEO Sandy Cilman.

Using Sony cameras, 3ality worked on the 2007 U2 film, *U2 3D*, the first live-action concert film now considered a landmark in the journey to mass-market 3D. 'The band were blown away when they say it,' recalls Cilman. 'The Edge couldn't get over how

isolated Larry [the drummer] was on stage. He hadn't realised how far apart everybody was until he saw the 3D film.'

Cilman also stresses the point that 3D is just one part of a wider digital revolution that is sweeping through Hollywood, where CGI and motion capture are transforming film entertainment to the point that film is increasingly absent from the process.

As for retro-fitting 2D films with 3D, it can be done at a cost of \$50,000 a minute, but results can be mixed, as *Clash of the Titans* has proved. On the other hand, it's fair to assume that if there is money to be made, it will happen. James Cameron has already revealed plans for a 3D version of *Titanic*, so expect other older classics to be given the treatment. This has eerie echoes of the colourised black-and-white fad, which came and went with merciful speed.

Looking to the future and outside the world of film, Buzz Hayes has some interesting advice for broadcasters such as Sky about shooting football in 3D. 'They need to rethink their camera positions,' is his verdict. Stereoscopy works better when shot diagonally across a football pitch, for example, rather than the halfway line. And because one rig provides more depth, less camera positions are required.'

It'll be interesting to see if this Hollywood advice is heeded ●

Noises off

What a Hollywood soundman thinks of home cinema...



Considering Greg Russell spends his working life mixing film soundtracks in sumptuous recording suites the size of a

small cinema, he is generous about the quality of cheap and cheerful surround systems. 'There are 5.1 home systems that sound pretty good for just a few hundred dollars,' he said. 'They don't bother me as much as when I go to a movie theatre and the centre horn is broken and it sounds terrible.'

Nominated for 13 Oscars, Russell has worked on a number of blockbuster hits including both *Transformers*, *Spider-Man 2*, *Enemy of the State*, *Pearl Harbour* and *The Rock*. They typically take him around two months, assembling literally hundreds of different audio tracks. The pre-mix process of dialogue alone lasts two weeks before he gets into the nitty gritty of sound effects and soundtrack music.

Standing in front of the tools of his trade, a vast mixing console running Avid Pro Tools, he talks passionately about his job. 'A movie doesn't come alive until the sound is there, but you have to get the balance right. It's about flying sounds around to envelop a room but at the same time making sure it doesn't distract from following the movie.'

Raimi day



Russell works closely with directors; some more closely than others. Sam Raimi impresses him because he is the only one who has insisted on sitting in on the home cinema mix. This is generally a three-day task, remixing a soundtrack for the domestic experience. 'Squishing the dynamic range', as Russell puts it.

And what of 3D? Russell mixed *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (main picture) and says the new format is throwing up fresh challenges. 'It's about experimenting with audio depth to accompany the pictures. You use very dry sounds, for example, to suggest something close up. It takes even longer to get right.'



The 2007 concert film *U2 3D* (left) was a landmark release for the era of 3D, but *Clash of the Titans* (right) has received negative reviews concerning its retro-fitted 3D effect





Team HCC
praises the shape-
shifting oeuvre of the
howling wolf-man

All change, please

Vampires have hogged the (artificial) limelight of late on both the small and silver screen, but the shaggy wolf story is neglected at your peril. It may even be that the remake of the 1941 classic *The Wolf Man*, soon out on Blu-ray, reignites our lycanthropic love affair.

The highlight of many werewolf movies (beyond the brutal, bloody killings, of course), is the transformation of regular guy (or gal) into howling beast. In *The Wolfman*, Benicio del Toro reprises the role (see page 100 for a full DVD review), and the special FX team, along with the actor's natural physiognomy, put most of their predecessors' lupine creations to shame. *Werewolf in London* (1935) was the first film to portray the anthropomorphic side of 'the change', but was compromised somewhat by lead actor Henry Hull's unwillingness to spend long in makeup. The result was a somewhat debonair, rather than beastly, werewolf. Not good.

Yet werewolf movies aren't always about horror. 1981's *An American Werewolf in London*, which taught us to 'stay on the road' on rambling trips to the Yorkshire Moors, expertly mixed comedy with carnage to box office-busting effect. (The belated sequel, *American Werewolf in Paris*,

was a flop, though, maybe because Paris is a city in which the presence of raw, bloody flesh rarely raises a bushy eyebrow). 1985's *Teen Wolf* eschewed the gore entirely, playing out the werewolf legend as a quip-filled commentary on the perils of being a teenager.

In fact, the 1980s are still the best decade to look to for fans of fiercesome furries. Check out Joe Dante's *The Howling*, and its six sequels, and the New York-set *Wolfen*.

In the intervening years, there's been less to get excited about – apart from the underwhelming Jack Nicholson vehicle *Wolf*, the genre has only been kept ticking over by low-budget fare like *Ginger Snaps* and *Dog Soldiers*.

Silver bullet-dodgers

Now, though, werewolves are back, and invading the small screen, too: BBC Three's *Being Human* is busy exploring the mundane nature of living in fear of a full moon, while the smash US vampire show *True Blood* is adding a pack of silver bullet-dodgers in its third season. So perhaps, the werewolf has finally stepped out of the moonlit shadows, and with a swagger to its low swinging stride, has finally come of age ●

Van Helsing: Hugh Jackman takes on Werewolves, Dracula and Frankenstein's Monster all in one movie



Quintessential Werewolf... *An American Werewolf in London's* pivotal scene



1 Claw blimey

The film's astonishing centrepiece begins with David's hand stretching before our eyes



2 Pass the Immac

From there, his body continues to transform thanks to Rick Baker's incredible full-body prosthetics



3 Facing a long stretch

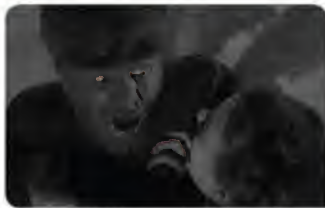
Baker also utilised robotic body parts to make it seem like the David's head was elongating



4 The eyes have it

The result was so spectacular, it led to the introduction of a new Oscar for outstanding makeup effects!

Must own...



The Wolf Man

Universal Pictures → R2 DVD
£6 Approx

It wasn't the first werewolf film, but this 1941 film is the one that gave us so much of the folklore that has become commonplace today (such as a lycanthrope's aversion to silver) and remains a true horror classic.

00.16: The title sequence gives an immediate idea of just how much print damage the film suffers from, and how much of a restoration it really needs.

40.41: The audience gets its first look at Jack Pierce's legendary makeup as the Wolf Man goes on the prowl.



An American Werewolf in London

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx

Mixing comedy and horror with unmatched skill, John Landis' film might be almost 30 years old, but it's still the pinnacle of the genre.

13.52: 'Stay on the road. Keep clear of the moors'. The terrifying first encounter with the creature makes the most of the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio mix.

66.29: A commuter discovers why you should avoid Tottenham Court Road tube station after dark.



Ginger Snaps

TVA International → R1 CE DVD
£15 Approx (Canadian Import)

Providing a refreshing feminist spin on a familiar story, this smart and gory jet black horror-comedy uses the conventions of the horror genre as a metaphor for puberty.

44.32: Ginger gets a little help from her sister, tying her newly-grown tail to her thigh, before joining her class for a game of hockey.

95.54: While there's no denying that the film is great, the rather duff special effects used to create Ginger's final transformation leave a lot to be desired.



The Howling

MGM → R1 DVD Special Edition
£10 Approx (US import)

Gore, sleaze and in-jokes galore are the order of the day in director Joe Dante's genre hit. Thankfully John Sayles' witty script is much, much better than the trashy Gary Brandner novel that inspired the film.

57.38: Unlike their usual cinematic brethren, *The Howling's* lycanthropes can change at will – day or night.

67.31: Although overshadowed by the same year's *An American Werewolf in London*, Rob Bottin's transformation effects are truly audacious.

Worth seeing...



Dog Soldiers

Pathe Distribution → R2 DVD
£18 Approx

Writer/director Neil Marshall made a big splash with his low-budget debut feature – a smart comedy-horror about a group of soldiers on a military exercise in Scotland coming up against a family of flesh-eating werewolves.

39.28: As werewolves go on the rampage outside, inside the house Sam the dog tries to help himself to a bit of intestine – while the owner is still alive!

89.22: With the help of a frying pan, one soldier is determined to show the werewolves that he's no pushover.



The Night of the Werewolf

BCI → All-region BD Double-Feature
£11 Approx (US import)

Spain's king of horror Paul Naschy won fans around the world with his series of films about the werewolf Waldemar Daninsky. This 1981 outing in the series, pitting him against vampires, is easily the best and most lavishly staged.

32.12: Never stop for a spot of nookie when there's a werewolf on the loose!

84.35: It's the moment we've all been waiting for, as the Waldemar werewolf faces off against the vampiric Elizabeth Bathory. Fight!



The Company of Wolves

ITV Studios Home Entertainment
R2 DVD Spec Ed → £16 Approx

Neil Jordan directed this dreamlike adaptation of Angela Carter's exploration of the sexual symbolism and themes that run rampant through folklore and fairytales.

24.36: 'If I were a wolf once more, I'd teach this whore a lesson'. The gorgeous restored transfer really sells the unorthodox transformation scene.

78.25: 'Jesus! What big teeth you have!' Rosaleen finally comes face-to-face with a werewolf.

Avoid...



An American Werewolf in Paris

Entertainment in Video → R2 DVD
£13 Approx

Bad werewolf sequels are ten-a-penny, but few are quite as insulting as this belated 1997 sequel to arguably the greatest werewolf flick ever. Awful!

30.41: CG invades the werewolf genre and the instantly outdated result will leave you pining for traditional prosthetic makeup effects

53.18: A werewolf is on the prowl, but the non-anamorphic 1.78:1 transfer is so dark and lacking in detail that it's hard to make out what's going on.

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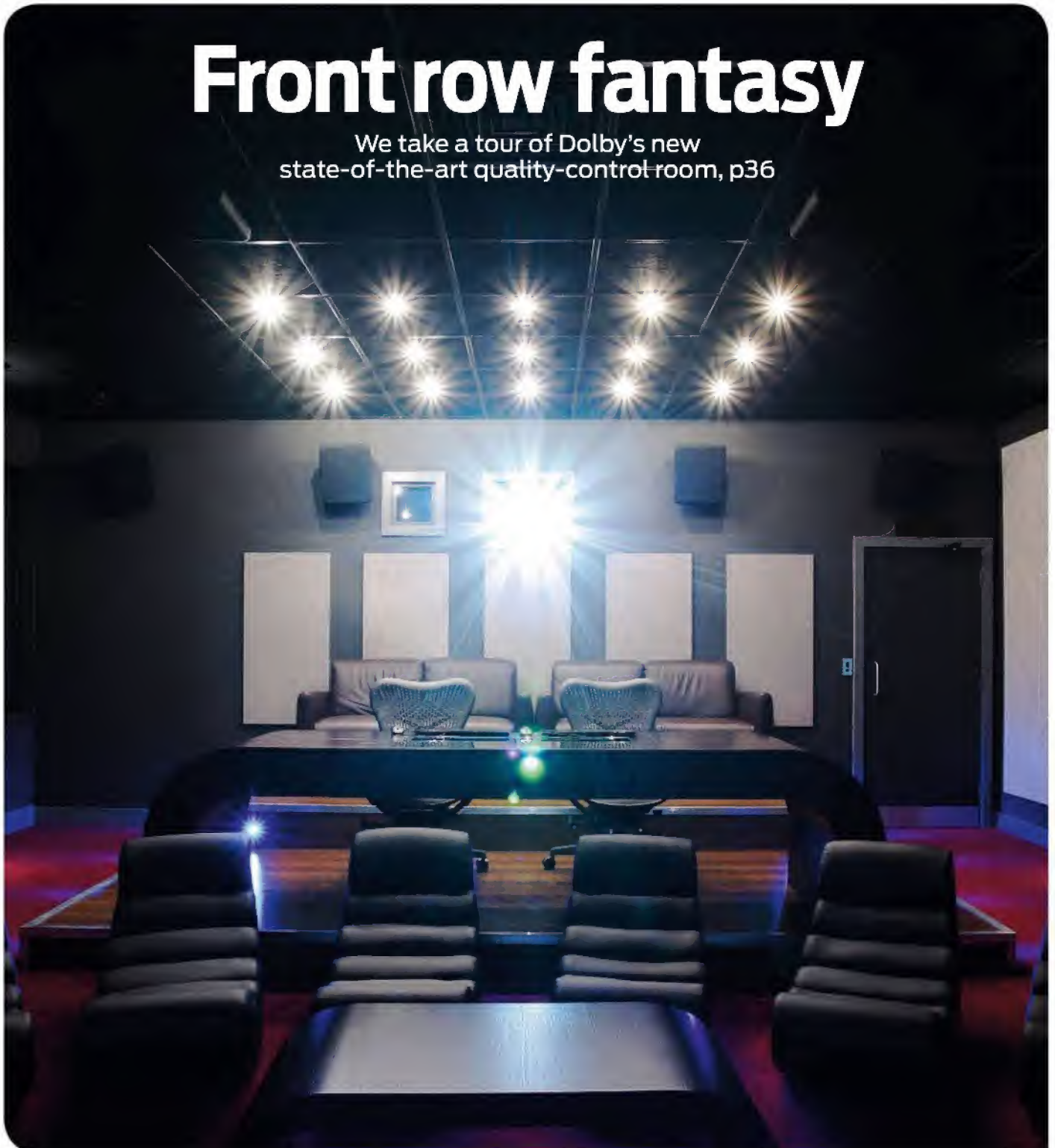


INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** **CLASSÉ** New range of rack-designed AV amplifiers
BOWERS & WILKINS The home audio specialist goes in-wall/in-ceiling **FORTRESS** Bespoke cinema seating all the way from the US **CEDIA** Our pick of the best installs and multiroom solutions from this year's CEDIA awards **AV-HOLIC!** An *HCC* reader guides you through his home cinema setup

Front row fantasy

We take a tour of Dolby's new state-of-the-art quality-control room, p36



Audio components with stealth

B&W and Classe add speakers and amplification that slide unobtrusively into the home

Audio specialist Bowers & Wilkins has been beaver away on two new ranges of custom install speakers that bring some of the brand's world-renowned technology to those looking to build a stealth cinema.

The CI 600 Series features both in-wall and in-ceiling models, designed for a 'smooth, non-fatiguing sound'. As you move up the price range, a host of performance enhancements, including Kevlar cones and Nautilus tweeters, come into play.

Most of the in-ceiling models use a variable-position tweeter and a three position bass-mid switch. This lets you balance a physically directed tweeter with the fixed bass-mid driver.

The CI 700 Series is targeted at audiophiles with space-saving issues. New features include fully-engineered baffles, integrated back boxes and a design that can be retrofitted. The speakers can be mixed and matched with the CT (Custom Theatre) 700 Series.



Showing a bit of Classe

Classe, part of the B&W group since 2001, also has good news for home cinema hedz planning a discreet install – a series of amplifiers, and a processor, designed specifically for housing in an AV rack.

Classe's CT models use Intelligent Cooling Tunnel (ICTunnel) architecture to enhance AV performance and reliability in what can sometimes be poorly-ventilated environments. The ICTunnel uses an aluminium bonded-fin heatsink, a technology usually found on medical,

laser and test equipment, which heats and cools quickly. A 'noiseless' fan, and pressure and temperature sensors, also work to maintain the amplifier's temperature.

Classe's CT components also have their own adjustable rack rails and a separate aluminum faceplate. The latter is not only designed to improve the aesthetic of your kit rack, but helps in cooling.

As for the electronics themselves, the CT-SSP is a 10-channel preamp/processor with balanced and single-ended connections for all channels. It offers internal decoding of Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio sources, and retails for around £7,000.

The £7,500 CT-5300 is a five-channel amp, claiming 300W per channel, while the partnering £5,550 CT-2300 offers two-channel amplification. You can partner this with the CT-5300 for a seven-channel system.

For more info check out the websites www.classeaudio.com and www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk



Rack 'em up: Classe's new install-friendly AV components are designed to be rack-mounted

Heard but not seen: The CI 700 Series features in-wall speakers like the Nautilus tweeter-packing CWM7.3

Keene to update



A trio of products from Keene Electronics have been updated for your listening delectation.

An IR distribution amplifier, the Keene IRBKIT, has been tweaked internally for faster signal processing and greater compatibility with other makers' kit. Next is the KLAB in-wall amplifier, where one user-configurable circuit now covers options including fixed gain and remote-free use. Finally, the VRC volume control offers remote control for devices with in-line connections. Its audio circuitry has been beefed up for lower distortion and wider input range. www.keene.co.uk

Support for iPad



Stardraw.com will soon offer support for the iPad with its universal system control platform, Stardraw Control 2010. The platform can use the iPad, or any device that supports a browser or talks HTTP, as a user interface device. It permits direct machine-to-machine communications, and the complementary AJAX technology (Asynchronous Java Script and XML) allows bi-directional use through HTML. The iPad features a 9.7in 1024 x 768 touchscreen, Wi-Fi connectivity, 10-hour battery life and is only 0.5in thick. www.stardraw.com/iPad

Fairest of all



Getting framed can be a costly experience but with a NEOD mirror TV it can at least be a luxurious one. The TV is only visible when switched on, leaving a black reflective mirror surrounded by a crafted wall-hanging frame – you can complement your room decor with one of nine finishes. The NEOD range uses Full HD Loewe LCDs, in sizes from 32-52in. If these don't quite fit the bill, one can be made to your specification. If the bill doesn't quite fit your wallet, you may have to stick with more conventional products. www.impactscreensolutions.co.uk

AC without DC



The last thing you want to hear with your music and soundtracks is an annoying hum. If the problem is coming not from your family but your mains supply, a blocking power distribution unit from Isol-8 may sort it out. The brand's new PowerLine Axis claims to offer a perfectly balanced AC waveform to up to five different components, eliminating DC voltage on the mains supply and restoring full power to the system. Isol-8 is so confident in the build-quality of its £500 brushed aluminium unit that it offers a five-year guarantee. www.isol-8.co.uk

Give me an 'S'



Small, stylish and stereo are just three of the 'S' words we could apply to Geneva Lab's Model

S iPod dock. This £300 little stunner is available in glossy black, red or white along with a silver pedestal and remote, and uses 30W of Class D amplification. Additional features include an FM tuner, alarm clock, and a stereo input so you can hook up an external computer or TV, to boot. Geneva Lab also claims its EmbracingSound tech offers a wider audio sweet spot than normal stereo. www.csecustom.com

iPad finds home



Touchpanel control obsessive Crestron has launched an iTunes App for Apple's iPad, which

brings touchscreen control of your AV and home automation to the must-have gadget's display. The Mobile Pro G iPad app comes with standard Crestron graphic template, but users can configure their own interfaces. 'The iPad is the hottest new thing right now,' says Director of Marketing Vincent Bruno, 'and Crestron is out in front with the most flexible and feature-rich control app available.' www.crestron.com

Boxing clever



Sony is trying to carve itself a niche in the curious world of AV-integrated home cinema stands. Its

RHT-G5/G11/G15 are designed for screens of 32-40, 42-52, 50-60in respectively, and offer three HDMI inputs (and one output) and a 2.1 speaker configuration – Sony's S-Force PRO Front Surround wizardry then creates a virtual 5.1 soundfield. The HDMI output will passthrough 1080p24 and 3D video to your TV; also thrown in is an FM radio tuner and iPod-friendly digital media port. Prices start at £500. www.sony.co.uk

Monkey business



UK-based manufacturer Monkey Cable has released its debut

range of HDMI interconnects, which includes v1.4-capable products. The range is three-tier – split into Concept (entry-level), Clarity (mid-range) and Connoisseur (high-end) – with each tier offering cables in 1m, 2m, 3m and 5m lengths. Prices range from £35-180, and bespoke lengths are also available on request. Monkey Cable will also shortly be releasing other hookup solutions, including optical and coaxial, mini HDMI, and speaker cable. www.monkeycable.com

Sit down, turn on, lean back

US cinema seating specialist Fortress wants us all to be sitting comfortably

Our home cinema hobby isn't all about the amplifiers, screen and speakers. Even the most impressive Blu-ray loses some impact if the springs on your old sofa are digging into your back. Good news, then, that US company Fortress is now offering a full range of cinema chairs in the UK with its distribution handled by Pulse Marketing.

Fortress has been around for over half a century, and builds its frames from solid combinations of birch plywood and alder, discarding screw connections in favour of more reliable mechanisms attaching metal to metal. The chairs reach all of the exacting US, EU and UK safety standards – the only ones, the company tells us, to do so.

Now then, now then!

Among the available options are motorised recliners, and Jimmy Savile-esque chairs with drawer-laden storage arms. Seating can be ordered with incorporated D-Box Motion, the system which relies on Blu-rays and DVDs to be appropriately coded. More than a thousand BDs/DVDs are now D-Box tagged, and, although the effect can be a little in-ye-face, it's definitely fun.

Popular Fortress models include the Moulin Rouge, which can be specified with corner units and fabric skirts, and the 1920s-styled Deco. The most basic chair is the non-bespoke California, which retails for around £1,500, while the standard leather 'Odeon-esque' Matinee goes for around £3,000.

For big spenders, you might pay around £13,000 for a £3,000 Matinee with electrical recliner, pocket arm, and the three-axis iteration of D-Box, which is even more involving than the two-axis version. Options includes choice of fabric, seating widths and backrest heights



(presumably saving some of the acreage that's more readily requested in the US), stainless steel cup holders, and more. You want a fridge built in? You got it.

Pulse Marketing's Mike Beatty outlined to HCC the bespoke nature of the seating. 'As long as your interior designer or installer is prepared to get involved with the design process, you can do pretty much whatever you want!'

These are seats 'for movie fanatics' who are 'serious about recreating the full cinema experience at home', he added.

www.fortresseating.com

Chairs with flair: Quality seating is a vital element of any home cinema install

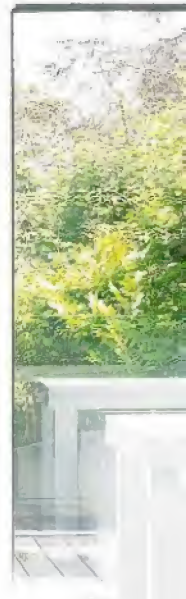
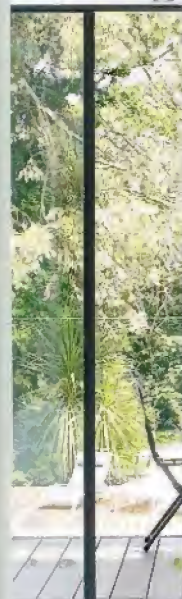
Dream Theatres



Best Integrated Home under £100,000 Winner – Prestige Audio – The White House

This stunning-looking home impressed the judges with its integration of AV, lighting, and security. The Crestron touch-panel built into the leather-clad pillar controls all zones inside and out; a projector and screen cover the cinema options. Colour-change lighting and an inside waterfall can alter the ambience instantly.

Planning a home cinema or smarthome makeover? Get inspiration from the CEDIA 2010 awards...

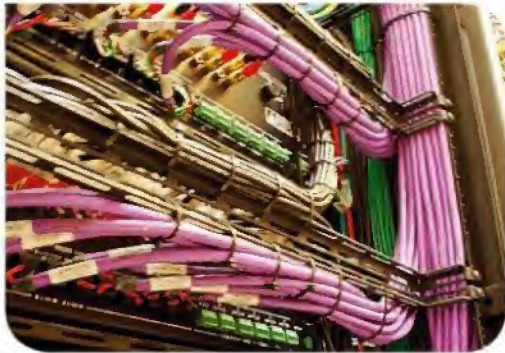


The Custom Electronic Design and Installation Association – CEDIA to the less verbose – is the international trade organization for the home electronic systems industry. Its annual awards ceremony brings together the finest examples of home installations from the UK and abroad – from the most extravagantly opulent to the kind of fiendishly clever and cost-effective installs more suited to the budgets of the rest of us.

This year, HCC's editor-in-chief Steve May added lustre to the judging panel at the London event covering Region 1. Not to be confused with DVD regions, R1 covers all of Europe, Africa, and much of Asia, too. But it's a home celebration for the Brits who have swept the trophy board.

Best Dressed Kit Racks

These two finalists show just how serious AV racks can be. **Hometech Integration** (top) custom-built this three-rack system that incorporates over 1,000m of cabling, while **Sensory International** (bottom) was responsible for this complex spaghetti junction that controls multiroom audio and video



Best Home Cinema under £40,000

Winner – Fab Audio Visual – Subterranean

The judges described this as a 'well considered and technically outstanding home cinema installation.' The setup includes three Genelec active in-wall speakers behind a 110in Screen Excellence acoustically-transparent screen. Two similar speakers and an active sub complete the audio mix.

Best Home Cinema under £40,000

Finalist – Projecting and Sounding ART – La Vie en Rose

The owner of this hi-tech but retro-styled room is a passionate movie fan, yet wanted the home cinema audio to stay behind closed doors. A comprehensive projector-led AV system took care of the first job, while layers of galvanised lead and recycled rubber form an acoustic baffle to keep the neighbours happy



Final Cut

The winners of the CEDIA 2010 awards...

Best Media Room under £15,000



Olive AV, Kensington Apartment, United Kingdom

Best Media Room over £15,000

Winner: MR Domotica, Rural Media, Netherlands

Best Home Cinema under £40,000

Winner: FAB AV, Subterranean, United Kingdom

Best Home Cinema £40,000 – £100,000

Winner: FAB AV, The Grey Room, United Kingdom

Best Home Cinema over £100,000

Winner: FAB AV, Gentleman's Club, UK

Best Integrated Home under £100,000

Winner: Prestige Audio, The White House, UK

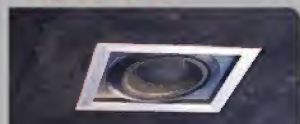
Best Integrated Home £100,000 – £250,000

Winner: Prestige Audio, St Pancras Penthouse, UK

Best Integrated Home over £250,000

Winner: Censys Residential Control, Kasteel Domein Amerloo, Netherlands

Best Innovative Solution – Residential



In-ceiling subwoofer!

Winner: T&T Automation, West London Gated Community, UK

Best Multi-dwelling

Winner: Finite Solutions, Greenhouse, UK

Best Marine

Winner: Sensory International, Slipstream, UK

Best Dressed Rack

Winner: T&T Automation, West London Family Mansion, UK



Best Integrated Home over £250,000

Highly Commended – Smart Home – Buckinghamshire Luxury Home

It took eight years to complete this project in a 17th Century Grade 1 listed property. Contrasting somewhat with the ornate interior is this 103in plasma TV – one of the property's 36 screens!

Best Home Cinema over £100,000

Finalist – SMC – Cotswold Screening Room

Installed in a Victorian garage, the well-connected owner of this room claims to have 'a cinema of choice for some of the world's most exacting filmmakers'. Oh, to be a fly on the wall.





Best Media Room over £15,000

Finalist – Sensory International – Cheshire Media Lounge

Sensory International's brief was to create a room where all the family could hang out and enjoy media from Sky+HD, DVD, Xbox and Wii, let alone the non-digital pool tables. Lighting accommodated both, while the video is handled by a 50in Pioneer plasma (remember them?), 100in projection screen, and SIM2 Domino projector



Best Home Cinema £40,000 – £100,000

Finalist – Dark Side of the Room – Dream Come True

Built for a discerning musician, this room was configured for seven-channel surround sound and boasts two subs alongside its 3m screen and THX-certified projector. Amongst the eclectic hardware are players for Laserdisc, MiniDisc and VHS tape



Best Innovative Solution

Finalist – Grahams Hi-Fi – Where did the PJ go?

A 5m-high ceiling necessitated this elaborate projector-in-a-cupboard solution

Best Innovative Solution

Finalist – The Pleasure Home – Smart Wall AV

The sports-loving owner of this install can watch three events at once thanks to this Smart Wall, and stroke the (optional) dog





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Deadline for Dolby

Dolby Labs wanted a new cinema room to master new releases. The catch? It had to be built in six weeks. **Gareth Mason** reports

Hidden away in plush premises in rural Wootton Bassett, Dolby Laboratories has a long heritage associated with the very best digital sound for cinema. But the company is now also heavily involved with digital cinema image processing and the mastering and distribution of digital cinema movies to cinemas.

The company's pride and joy in their facility is a spectacular 60-seat cinema with some of the finest

acoustics in the world. For the last 20 years it has been used to develop and test many of the cinema surround sound technologies AV-geeks are familiar with in the home. But more recently it has been running around the clock to quality control the soundtrack and image quality of digital cinema master copies before they are released into the cinemas. Hence the need for this second room, built with lightning

speed by installation experts Vivid Research.

Explains Richard Welsh, Dolby's Director of Digital Cinema Mastering: 'The major film studios are now releasing nearly every one of their films in a digital cinema format. And we are normally the gateway for the Hollywood studios to distribute these movies into many European and international countries. This can mean we are mastering up to 40

Relax:
The cinema seating and console were custom-built by 3rdEdition



Kit Checklist

- Barco:** DP2000 DLP Cinema 2K resolution projector plus 1.2-1.8 DC2K DLP Cinema lens
- Dolby:** 3D projector colour wheel adaptor kit; 3 x Dolby Lake audio processors; CP750 audio cinema processor and remote fader; DSS200 digital cinema playback system
- Harkness:** 6m Cinemascope 1.0 gain screen; motorised 1.33:1/1.77:1/1.85:1/2.35:1 aspect ratio masking system
- JBL:** 5 x JBL active LCR; 12 x JBL 8320 surrounds; 1 x JBL 1,000W (peak) active cinema subwoofer
- QSC:** 12 x DCA2422 425W surround amplifiers
- Doremi:** Digital cinema playback system
- Lutron:** Grafik Eye lighting controller; SeeTouch keypads and RS232 interface
- Raritan:** 2 x networked KVM for system control
- Fostex:** 6301D active monitor for audio description playback
- Cat6:** Networking patchbays and switches; audio patchbays (analogue and digital); HDSDI patchbays
- Cineak:** Acoustic wall absorbers/diffusers
- Armstrong:** Absorbing/isolating ceiling tiles
- 3rd Edition Furniture:** Custom console and furniture

The control desk (below) from where every aspect of a digital print can be analysed



different language versions – some with subtitles, many with complete replacement dubbed soundtracks.

'With every version needing to be quality-controlled under strict conditions before the master copy can be bulk duplicated and released, we knew we needed a second cinema room, and we needed it fast.'

Wiltshire-based Vivid Research got the call, and not because it had a big ad in the Yellow Pages. Its

founder Graham Edmondson is an ex-director of Dolby Labs and played a leading role in the company's first work with digital cinema. Edmondson explains: 'It was having that knowledge and background, combined with the experience of designing, constructing and installing high-end home cinemas that enabled me to take on this new project with the confidence that we could deliver on time.'

44 INSTALLS

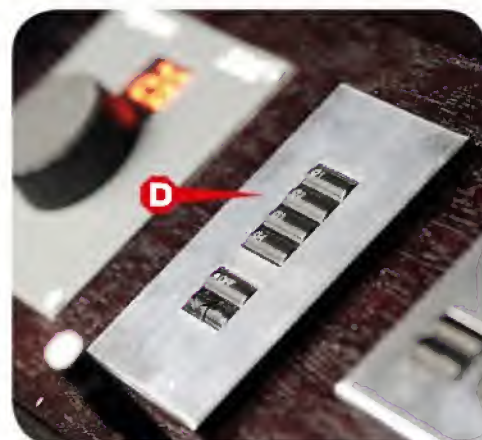


A Dream screen

You wouldn't expect Dolby to use a 14in black-and-white TV to scrutinise new releases, hence this six-metre Harkness Cinemascope screen – a minimum size for film studios for quality control work, as it allows picture defects to be accurately identified

B Swarms of speakers

JBL speakers are everywhere you turn in this state-of-the-art demo room. The system runs a 17.1 array, with 12 of the surround cabinets driven by individual 425W power amps. The front stage also packs additional 'height' channels for use with Dolby Pro-Logic IIz



C Wiry Build

The sheer quantity of electronics installed by Vivid Research naturally requires a cornucopia of cabling

D Console me

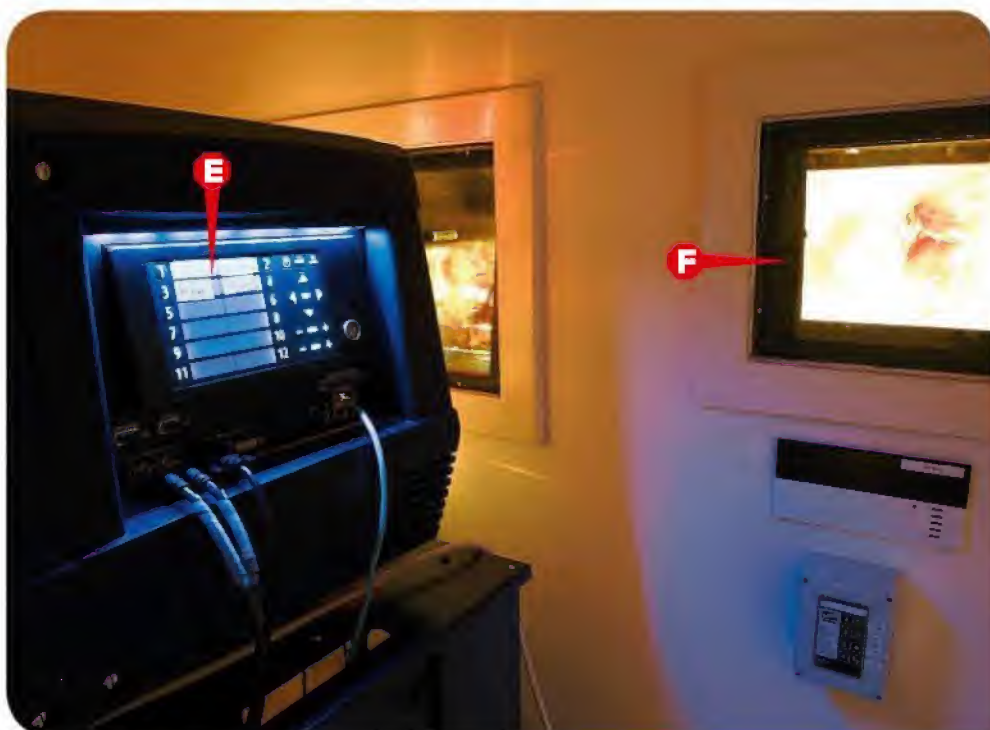
The focus of the room is a large console that looks like it could have been stolen from the *USS Enterprise*. This can control all systems within the entire Dolby mastering plant, as well as give local control over cinema lighting, screen masking, playback volume and more

E Blue-blooded Barco

This rear view of Barco's DP-2000 gives some indication of the sheer size of this pro-level projector

F View to a kill

This backroom monitor would probably out-perform most folks' home cinema screen



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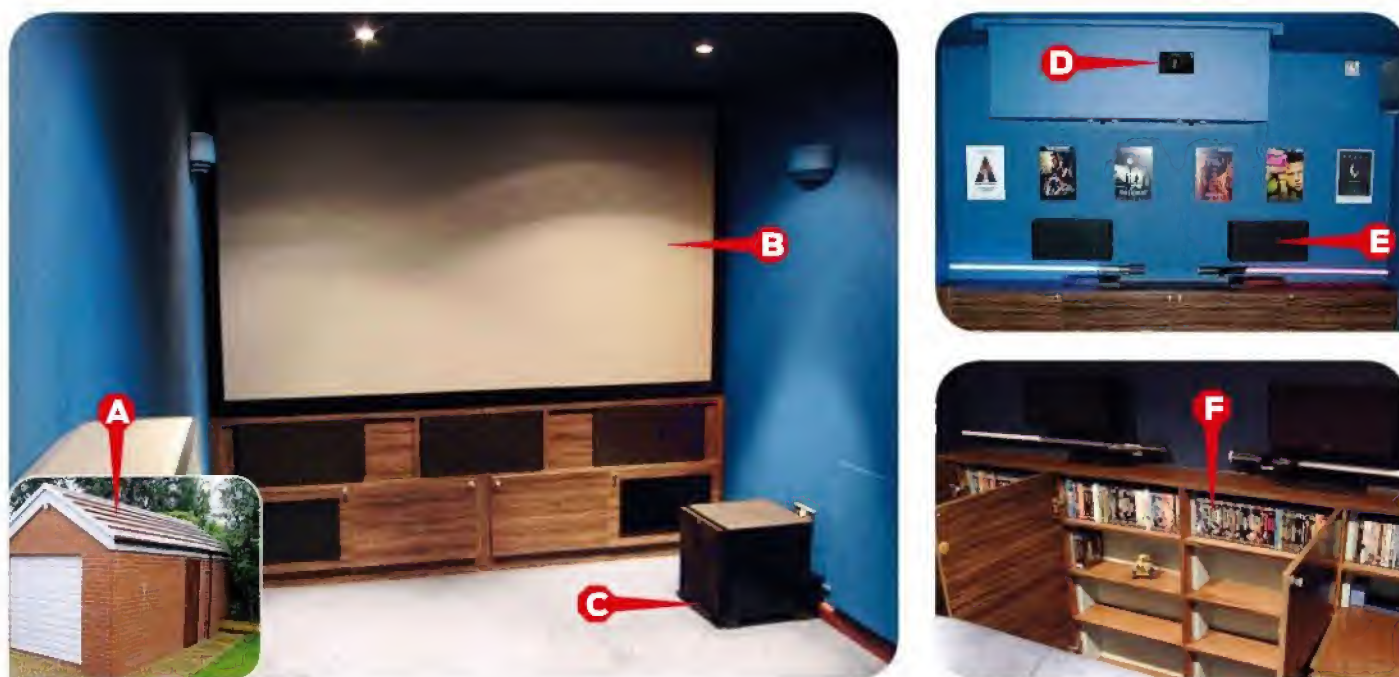
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Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, an **HCC reader** invites you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setup...



Sent to the garden:
But it's not a punishment for John

Introduce yourself...

I'm John Morris, 37, and I'm a car sales executive.

And you're an AV-holic?

As long as I can remember. It started with a Nicam video recorder attached to my hi-fi system, but it was movies that got me started. After reading a very old edition of your magazine I bought a Laserdisc player, a Yamaha AC-3 amplifier, and 5.1 speakers for my small bedroom. The rest is history.

What's in your setup?

My current setup includes a purpose-built soundproofed garage as a cinema room. I have an InFocus IN82 projector and Projecta Homescreen Deluxe 108in screen with a high-contrast grey screen material, and Jamo D6 THX Ultra front speakers, Jamo D6 THX surrounds, and a REL R-505 subwoofer. Images come from a Pioneer BDP-09FD US import Blu-ray player through an Onkyo TX-SR875. Other kit includes a Futronix P50 four-scene

dimmer switch, a Daikin FXTG-35 aircon unit (as used in HCC's 'Stealth Cinema' build – see #157), and a Blu-eye infrared remote blaster to operate the kit in my custom-made cabinets. I also have a projector hushbox, built by my father, to limit the sound of the projector fan. It works very well and gives me easy access to the projector's zoom and focus.

What will be your next equipment purchase?

A Logitech Harmony 1100 remote – looks very nice indeed.

How much have you spent on your AV habit over the years?

Too much to even begin thinking about! Around £30K without taking into account Blu-ray media, but perhaps a figure of around £50/60K over the years.

What's your current fave disc?

The Dark Knight – it looks and sounds amazing.

Are you excited about 3D?

Not as much as I thought I would be. I may change my mind after a demo, though! ●

Room essentials

A Garage glamour

The most substantial component has to be the purpose-built soundproofed garage

B Fullscreen

The 108in projector screen makes maximum use of the available space

C Sub standard

A REL subwoofer provides the kind of low-end grunt you might not get away with in your front room

D Hang it high

An InFocus IN82 projector is mounted to the ceiling in this custom-made 'hushbox'

E Four of a kind

Four Jamo D6 THX surround speakers team up with the LCRs to deliver seven-channel audio

F Disc collection

John admits he's spent thousands of pounds on software alone

Join the club

Do you want to see your home cinema system featured in the pages of *Home Cinema Choice*? If so, log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/avholic where you'll find all the information you need.

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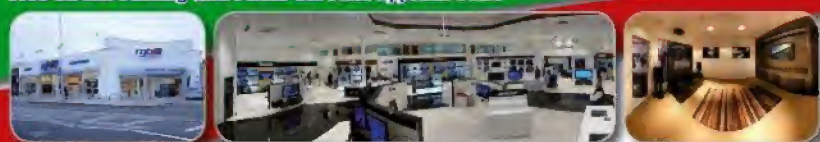
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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** PANASONIC Flagship 3D plasma TV and 3D Blu-ray player, plus all-in-one BD cinema system SKY 1TB satellite PVR IMERGE Premium-grade home entertainment server SCREEN INNOVATIONS Innovative 'Black Diamond' projector screen PARADIGM 4,500W subwoofer GROUPTEST Freeview HD set-top boxes AND MUCH MORE!

Yes, Masters

NAD has revamped its Masters Series components for the Blu-ray age. Run to p58 for our in-depth review



HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT – IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

50 PANASONIC TX-P50VT20/DMP-BDT300 → £2,000/£350 Approx
www.panasonic.co.uk



AV/CV

Product:
3D plasma TV
and Blu-ray
player

Positioning:
Panasonic's
first foray into
3D technology

Peers:
Samsung
40C7000/
Samsung
BD-C6900;
LG47LD920



3D plasma spec-tacular

Can the extra dimension move plasma back into the home cinema spotlight? **Steve May** thinks so

In the land-grab that is the nascent 3DTV market, it's Panasonic above all other brands that appears to have the best credentials to stake a claim. Its groundbreaking behind-the-scenes development work on the multiview codec that enables Full HD 3D is indisputable, and its vision for bringing a new generation of 3D to the home the most mature. This is the company that began talking 3D up first, and nailed its supportive colours to the *Avatar* mast long before James Cameron's tree-hugging Na'vi took over the world.

So the arrival of the first 3DTV and Blu-ray combination from the brand is, even the most vocal 3D cynics must agree, a significant event in the history of home cinema. So much so that I almost rolled out a red carpet to welcome the courier man delivering the TX-P50VT20 TV and DMP-BDT300 player.

The latter is the most feature-packed Blu-ray player from Panasonic yet, and compatibility with frame-sequential BD has resulted in some changes to the standard BD player configuration. Obviously the twin HDMI output on the back is a key giveaway, >

Spex appeal: The 3D eyewear has a decidedly futuristic look



52 REVIEWS

offering one-cable compatibility with non-HDMI v1.4 AVRs when it comes to lossless audio. But there are also changes beneath the hood, with **a beefed-up UniPhier chipset, and some high-quality audio components.**

The P50VT20 TV incorporates Panasonic's latest NeoPDP panel. This means it can run brighter than previous Panasonic plasmas, but has been reined in for better power efficiency. The curious upshot is that out of the box, the picture actually looks a little dim. Printed specifications indicate a contrast ratio that's off the scale, but in reality it looks much like other PDPs in the current Panasonic range. Which is to say jolly good.

As with previous Panasonic TVs, the GUI options are inconsistent, and navigating around menus is a bit like exploring an old dark house. Options come and go, depending what you happen to be doing/watching/thinking/eating at the time. The main menus are utilitarian with no visual flourishes, but select the Viera Tool bar and you're into a more graphical environment. This bar gives you the option of selecting files from USB devices, changing the 3D mode or exploring networked content.

Both the TV and Blu-ray player are DLNA compliant, but their performance is variable. Via the TV, I could playback a wide range of video files including DivX, AVI and MKV. There's also JPEG and MP3 support. The sibling deck's networking talents are less comprehensive. The player could see most (not all) devices on my network. However, while I could drill down to files, I couldn't play much and got a terse 'Cannot Play' message). This is because there is no audio support, and video playback is present principally to work with AVCHD recordings. JPEG pictures, though, can be viewed.

A minor miracle

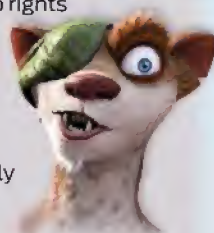
The VT20 screen ships with two pairs of 3D eyewear. These sync with the screen, which has two IR emitter clusters in its bezel. The glasses look striking but are not particularly comfortable, and there are issues with the design. The lenses stand away from the arms, supposedly to allow prescription-spectacle wearers to double up. A consequence of this is that you can see your own reflection in the amber lenses. In anything other than a dark room a reflection of my own ears proved a curious distraction.

The software situation

As part of its 3D offering, Panasonic is bundling two 3D BD titles, *Ice Age 3* and *Coraline*, with its 3DTV and BD player. The deal runs until 2011 and means that these titles will not be available elsewhere for retail until then.

3D fans will have a limited choice of titles in the early days of the format, as Samsung has exclusive access for 12 months to *Monsters Vs Aliens* on 3D Blu-ray, and has tied up rights to the 3D versions of the *Shrek* franchise.

Panasonic's offering is only available if you buy the 3DTV and the Blu-ray player in a bundle; buy separately and you don't get the software.



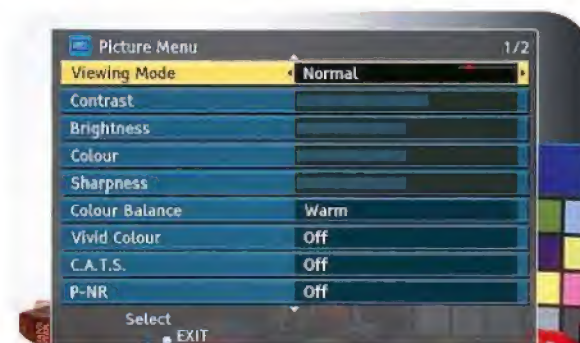
The TV supports frame-sequential (Blu-ray) 3D, Side-by-Side (Sky) and Top and Bottom 3D techniques. In a fully HDMI v1.4 environment, the TV will auto detect the signal type and adjust accordingly. Like most of us I don't have that luxury at present.

Initially I routed the HDMI video output of the DMP-BDT300 through an (Onkyo) AVR. However, the TV did not recognise the fact that I was playing a 3D Blu-ray disc, and could not be forced into a 3D mode (I could, however, manually select Side-by-Side, for a feed from Sky 3D). Instead, I had to run an HDMI from the Panasonic deck direct to the TV, sidestepping the receiver. The deck's secondary HDMI outputs came in handy here; lossless audio could still be fed to the AVR.

I auditioned a variety of 3D sources on the screen. What limited 3D Blu-ray material I have (a test disc with various footage) appeared sharp and smooth. One artefact often talked about when it comes to 3D delivery is crosstalk, which manifests itself as a slight ghost around objects, but on this screen I noticed nothing significant.

Sky's 3D preview channel was revelatory. The satcaster uses a side-by-side half-resolution format, which might lead you to think image clarity is significantly less than 3D Blu-ray. However, its live sports coverage looked terrific, with excellent depth and detail. Crowd scenes during the various footy clips displayed superb delineation.

One consequence of watching in 3D is the havoc played with colour temperature and fidelity. There is no dedicated 3D viewing mode on the screen which effectively equalises the tint in the 3D spex. You can try to compensate but the simple fact



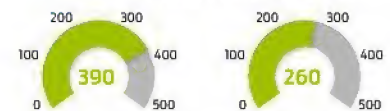
Nothing fancy: Panasonic hasn't much changed the menu design of its AV products for years, and still favours a familiar boxy approach





→ Tech Labs (TX-P50VT20)

Power consumption: Watts



In standby: Running our 100IRE white screen, the TX-P50VT20 sucks 390W of juice

Powered: Switching to test footage lowered the figure to a more respectable 260W

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Short of Panasonic's 'Infinite Black' figure, but our measurement of 62,000:1 (in Normal mode) is a great real-world reading

Colour accuracy



Presets: ISFccc manual tweaks are available to deliver 6,500K. Among the CT presets, both Warm and THX achieve 6,100K
Cool: 9,600K
Normal: 7,100K
Warm: 6,100K
THX: 6,100K

→ Specifications

TX-P50VT20

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p/24
3D: YES Active Shutter – Two pairs of Active Shutter spex included
Tuner: YES Freeview HD, Freesat HD
Component: yes one set
HDMI: YES 4 x HDMI v1.4
Resolution: 1920 x 1080
Sound: 30w (2 x 10W + 10W woofer)

Brightness (claimed): N/A
Contrast ratio (claimed): 5:million to 1
Dimensions (w/o stand): 1,224(w) x 771(h) x 90(d)mm

Weight (w/o stand): 27.5kg
Features: SD card slot with AVCHD support; 600Hz Sub Field Drive with Intelligent Frame Creation; high-efficiency Neo PDP panel; THX certification; Viera Link CEC; 2 x USB for media playback; DLNA compliant, (JPEG, MP3, DivX, MKV, AVI support); Viera Cast portal; 2x RGB Scart; Ethernet connection; Optional wireless LAN dongle; video recording via an external hard drive

DMP-BDT300

3D: YES
Upscaling: YES to 1080p over HDMI
Multiregion: NO Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES 2 x v1.4
Component: YES one set
Multichannel analogue: YES 7.1
Digital audio: YES Optical and coaxial
SACD/DVD-A: NO
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES

Dimensions: 430(w) x 66(h) x 245(d)mm **Weight:** 2.6kg
Features: Optional Wi-Fi dongle; DLNA support; Viera Cast content portal; USB; Tube & Remaster audio processing

HCC Test card

HCC's test card (special 3D edition) has been designed to torture even the toughest screens...



A Naturalistic red
This NeoPDP offers slightly muted but believable reds and avoids the orangey tang common on LCD screens. Skin tones are good.

B Great greys
Not only does this screen have deep blacks, its excellent greyscale performance translates to good shadow detail

C Crosstalk silenced
Using bespoke 3D test patterns and evaluation discs the HCC Tech Labs declared this screen free of 'ringing' 3D artefacts



is these glasses kill whites and darken everything. However, the TV's Dynamic preset, universally reviled in all its guises on every brand of TV, is actually the best mode for watching 3D material. Purists may well recoil in horror, but I found it gave images the nicest visual pop – 3D pictures are bright and vivid enough to bring pizzazz to what is not so much a cinephile experience as a fun one.

Moving on from 3D, the VT20's standard 'flat' picture performance is accomplished. Image quality from the three Freeview HD channels in particular is sparkling, with fabulous detail and texture.

One foible of the brand has been an historical reluctance to offer extensive user-definable picture parameters on its TVs. This began to change in 2009, and here you get a fair amount of control on offer. The screen can be configured for ISFccc Night & Day, and you can get into RGB management, play with gamma levels, etc.



Blu-ray 3D champ

DMP-BDT300 is no slouch on the AV front

Panasonic's first 3D BD player is very good indeed. As a 2D disc-spinner it's as fine as any previous (award-winning) model from the brand, albeit with much improved loading times.

Image quality is great, and the audio playback is interesting, too. The deck features an usual processing mode dubbed Tube Sound, which sets out to replicate the sonic characteristics of valve amplifiers. *HCC's* resident audiophile Alvin Gold was horrified by the concept, but it actually sounds rather good. There are three degrees of 'tubeness,' of which the second is probably the most satisfying. We found it injected an element of analogue warmth into both pop and rock CDs, as well as bit-starved MP3 recordings.

Cutting-edge:

The DMP-BDT300 is the most advanced BD player yet from Panasonic

Black fidelity is very good, if not best-in-class, with some crushing of detail in those blacks near Super Black. Try and bring this shadow detail out and you'll see speckling white noise – that's your warning that Brightness is set too high.

Overscan oversight

The VT20 is THX-certified; included in the menus is a well-judged preset optimised for movie playback. This mode also disables overscan and gives 1:1 pixel matching. Interestingly, the THX mode is disabled when 3D content is detected. It becomes a True Cinema mode instead.

In addition to our usual Tech Labs reference discs, I also used the High Resolution test disc produced by leading Japanese coding/authoring house Qtec for my evaluation. This conclusively confirmed that picture resolution from the P50VT20 is first class, with clear image delineation up to 1080 lines. Moving picture resolution traditionally causes a drop of clarity on LCD screens, but not on this PDP. Fine detail remains intact at a variety of scrolling speeds. Detail is sharp and blur free. This makes the set great for both sports and action movies.

Sound wise, the set brings back the bamboo drivers last seen on Panasonic TVs a couple of years ago. To be honest, I rate the audio performance as little more than functional. There is no volume or body to the audio, and certainly little in the way of stereo imaging. This is not so much a complaint specific to Panasonic – all of today's thin-screens sound pretty weedy.

Overall, this TV and Blu-ray player make a formidable 3D combination. In terms of three-dimensional depth, I'd argue they have an edge over the rival Samsung screen/BD combination reviewed in *HCC* #180. More significantly, they can be considered great 2D performers, too. If you're looking to future proof your home cinema, they're an essential audition.

→ Tech Labs (DMP-BDT300)

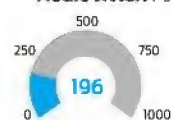
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Having 3D capability doesn't make much difference to a BD deck's power consumption

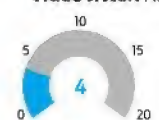
Playing: We measured a 5W increase when spinning a disc

Audio Jitter: Ps



Sound: This analogue figure is very good, and in line with Panasonic's other top-end BD deck, the DMP-BD85

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: This is a respectable video jitter result

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

3s

Tray in to main BD menu

55s

Disc loading & Java:

This is the fastest we've recorded a Panasonic BD deck to boot and load



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P50VT20/
DMP-BDT300
£2,000/£350 Approx

Highs: Both TV and player are outstanding 2D components in their own right; involving ultra-smooth 3D experience

Lows: The glasses need a design rethink; inconsistent user experience across the two products

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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**TrustedReviews.com, 09/2009: Overall: 9/10
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- >> Columns in an ultra-flat profile – only 8.3 cm deep
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Sky ups the limit

The HD satellite broadcaster has bolstered its Sky+ range with a 1TB monster. **Steve May** goes on a recording frenzy

There are PVRs... and then there is the Sky+HD 1TB box. This latest iteration of the UK's most popular digital recorder is the fastest, slickest, biggest receiver yet from the UK satcaster.

Somewhat like Lady Ga Ga, the attractiveness of the original Sky+HD receiver (and now the default unit for any new Sky+ subscriber), divided opinion. But there's no debate about this new version: it's a beauty. Slightly smaller than the original, with an unusual pearlescent grey finish and understated cosmetics, this Amstrad-made box is a bit of a head-turner.

Beneath the polished hood is a hulking 1.5 Terabyte hard drive. Be aware that 'only' 1TB of this is available for your personal recordings; the rest is partitioned off for Sky's Push content service, Sky

Anytime. It may have taken Anytime (ahem) time to develop into a worthwhile service, but it is now a great (DOG-less) catch-all for key movie premieres and season openers/finales. So being able to store more content here can only be a good thing.

The iconic Sky remote has also had a very slight cosmetic upgrade which reflects the same steel-grey finish of the main unit.

Backside connections are standard fare. There's an HDMI v1.3 output, digital optical audio, Scart for legacy connection, dish-friendly F-connectors, plus (inactive) e-SATA, USB and Ethernet ports. There's also a sleeping USB behind the front fascia flap.

For the record, Sky's PVR unit does the same stuff as before, including one-touch series recording,

AV/CV

Product:
High-capacity
1.5TB satellite
receiver

Position:
The best
equipped HD
PVR currently
available

Peers:
Virgin Media
V+ cable PVR
(160GB);
BT Vision Plus
(160GB)

two tuners, and pausing and rewinding of live TV. Those hoping for an additional third tuner (à la Virgin Media's V+HD unit) may be disappointed.

No need to ration

When it comes to hi-def, no other platform offers as much choice as Sky. At the last count it boasted around 40 channels, with Sky News HD the newest attraction. As any long-standing Sky+HD user knows, the actual consequence of such high-resolution richness was a need to ration what is recorded. HD programmes naturally consume more HDD space than SD, and like many users I quickly found myself waging a King Canute-like battle against disk space. This in turn meant I was skipping a lot of material I might otherwise have liked



to see, particularly from the numerous HD film channels.

The upgrade in capacity offered by the new 1TB drive changes everything.

Suddenly there's no pressing space constraint. Whereas before I would make a judgement call if a show really needed to be time-shifted in high-definition, now I could always go for the best-quality option. With four times more memory than a regular box, you can hoard around 240 hours of HD content. I suddenly found myself recording hi-def movies simply because I could, just to see how much I could budge the percentage space gauge. The freedom is dizzying.

I suspect the space boost may also pay big dividends when Sky rolls out its Pull version of Anytime later this year (that's if it involves pulling content onto the hard drive rather than just streaming?). As it stands, the box can bag around 100 hours of on-demand HD, which means you

HD EPG: Sky's HD receivers have a very different user interface than the standard Sky+ box

may never have to watch any standard-def channels ever again.

In practical terms, this 1TB box also seems faster than previous models. The EPG, which is cached on the drive, isn't as laggy as on the original HD boxes. Navigation is crisp and responsive. I've had both the original Thomson box (it died) and a newer (component-less) variant, and this is the best of the lot.

Image and sound quality is largely dependent on the broadcast source. Overall performance can be considered excellent, with the best-encoded channels looking astoundingly sharp. Curiously, the new box still refuses to output multichannel sound (Dolby Digital 5.1) over HDMI – only stereo PCM is available.

I still have some issues with the format of the high-def EPG interface – I can't be alone in wanting an option to disable both the mini TV and accompanying audio (I've lost count of the number of times I've inadvertently seen/heard the end of a show I'm recording) – but general usability is undeniably better.

Welcome upgrade

Overall, this is welcome upgrade to the original Sky+HD design, and the hard drive bump seems appropriate given the ever-increasing number of HD channels coming to the platform. For TV and home cinema addicts, this 1TB treat is well worth the premium ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: This is a high figure for a product in Standby – the box must be doing something...

On: Switching the box on doesn't make much difference to its overall power consumption

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: yes 1TB (plus 500GB for Anytime Push service)

DVB tuner: no Twin Sky HD satellite tuners

HDMI: yes

Component output: no

Phono output: no

Digital audio output: yes coaxial and optical

Dimensions: 351(w) x 265(d) x 73(h)mm

Weight: 4.1kg

Also featuring: Seven-day EPG with Mini TV; one touch recording; series linking; Sky Anytime Push VOD; Sky+ functionality; RF loopthrough; e-SATA, USB, & Ethernet (all currently inactive); RS-232; Scart



HCC VERDICT

Sky+HD 1TB
From £250 Approx, plus subs/
installation

Highs: Huge recording capacity; fast, responsive EPG; design; HD video performance

Lows: No Dolby Digital 5.1 over HDMI; no audio disable on the EPG

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

NAD's masterplan embraces HD

Richard Stevenson reacquaints himself with the flagship range of a high-end AV stalwart



You can only love or loathe the wall of buff metal-work that is the full-fat NAD Masters Series home cinema system. As a high-end range of components the design is every bit as funky, industrial and quirky as the near £9,000 price ticket suggests, albeit cosmetically almost identical to the original Masters Series setup reviewed and raved about by *HCC* around three years ago.

What has changed is the technology on the inside. Okay, the M25 power amplifier is the same potent, class AB, fun-loving seven-channel beast, but the source and processor are much advanced on the old models.

The M56 is a fully Wi-Fi enabled Blu-ray player, meaning that even if you can't run a network cable to your AV room, you can still access BD-Live content and firmware updates over your wireless network. It claims to offer super-fast disc-loading, and the usual 1080p24 output, 1080p upscaling of DVDs and on-board decoding and 192kHz DACs for Dolby True HD and DTS-HD. It handles DivX HD discs without a wobble and the internals look like an exercise in heavy-duty engineering. Under the lid it is all heavy-weight PCBs and chunky great components with a serious look about them, indicating copious R&D investment in the audio and video performance department.

It does indeed spin up a disc in next to no time (our Tech Labs recorded an impressive 47-second

loading time), which is something to appreciate if your current BD spinner needs a week's notice before rolling the credits. Slightly annoyingly, the drawer doesn't allow the disc to clear the fascia completely, resulting in a few platter-flipping incidents before I got the hang of easing them out forwards. That's only a minor gripe, though.

In terms of menus, the M56 is a world removed from the stoic text-heavy menus of NAD's previous M55 DVD/universal player. It is a slick full-colour graphic user interface that sees off much of its mainstream competitors with an applaudable combination of cosmetic charm and simple usability. Even the Wi-Fi network setup is a dream, and didn't require any of the usual repositioning, continuously re-locating the network, DNS protocol problems (whatever the hell they are...) or hardcore swearing and reverting to a wired connection.

A USB port on the front of the M56 accepts the usual range of multimedia formats and doubles as additional BD-Live storage should the internal memory run out of space (and assuming someone ever creates some worthwhile BD-Live content...). Finishing touches include a vivid blue display (dimmbable, of course) and a chunky aluminium-topped remote control. All of the constituent features and parts of the M56 add up to a cracking package, but the pudding wasn't quite the proof it should have been. More of which later.

AV/CV

Product:
Pre/power combination with matching Blu-ray player

Positioning:
NAD's flagship system package

Peers:
Arcam AV888/P777;
Onkyo PR-SC5507/PA-MC5500/BD-SP807

M is for modular

Virtually the only thing that the original M15 and the new M15HD have in common is their peculiar visual charm. I like it, but in the same way I always found Carol Vorderman quite fanciable.

The M15HD is a radical new design whose biggest selling point for anyone fed up with the increasing cost of chasing the latest technology (cue plenty of *HCC* readers nodding in agreement...) is its completely modular design. Very much like a high-end PC, almost every major module is board-mounted with a connection panel that projects through the rear panel of the player.

At the time of writing there are no Masters Series upgrade modules available, but the concept is already in full flow with NAD's step-down T-series AV receivers, with available audio and video modules allowing buyers to spec different levels of HDMI connectivity, Audyssey processing/setup, different DSP speeds, etc.

But the advantage of NAD's modular concept goes further, by offering a degree of future-proofing. **Theoretically, when the next big DTS/Dolby format comes along, you'll be able to just upgrade to a new audio board.** Really need the bandwidth and Ethernet channel of HDMI v1.4 for 3D? Then simply spec a new video board rather than buy a whole new processor.

While I am sworn to secrecy on what modules are in the pipeline, >

The build and finish of NAD's Masters Series products is first-rate





Backside story:

The connective options on the M15HD processor (middle) are extensive, though balanced XLR jacks are absent

expect boards with greater HDMI inputs/outputs, home automation boards integrating Control 4 protocol, and a board that offers bi-directional multimedia streaming over Wi-Fi. Oops, I might have let a cat out of the bag there.

And it is not only the modular design that sets the M15HD apart from its forbear. This beast has four times the processing power of the original, including the very latest 32bit floating point DSPs and 128x oversampling ADCs for analogue audio inputs. **Then there's Sigma's VXP video engine, an absolute peach of a piece of electronics,** derived from the pro-broadcast world and capable of handling HD formats up to 2048 x 2048 resolution. While that is never going to be a domestic standard, 1080p should be a walk in the park. The VXP engine's output feeds a suite of ultra-high-speed DSPs, meaning a video latency of less than 20ms even at 1080p/60Hz and full-bore cinematic action.

The old M15 was a bit short on features compared to the competition at the time, but the designers of the M15HD have clearly been shopping. Three independent zones, masses of CI features and an RS232 interface, PC-programmable remote control, a much slicker GUI, iPod dock connection, second remote and enough hard-core audiophile components to keep music lovers happy. There isn't quite the depth of video tweakery available with, say Denon's AVP-A1UD, nor any THX certification, USB compatibility or Audyssey DSX/Dolby Pro-Logic IIz shenanigans, but it's otherwise right up there with the features-fest alternatives. Blimey – and from NAD, too!

The old M15 won many admirers and a lot of international awards for its flexibility and all round sonic virtues, including an HCC Reference Status badge. A lot of those accolades were derived from NAD's philosophy of simplicity, performance and value, the old M15 being just £2,000 in its day. So, with many more features, bristling with cutting-edge modular design and offering some high-end third party components, can the M15HD be as impressive now its price has soared to £4,000?

M is for monstrous

Moving away from all that serious DSP and digital wizardry for a dose of

Brunel scale engineering, let's take another look at the M25 seven-channel power amplifier. It is a staunchly old-school analogue amplifier with a traditional mix of whopping great power supplies, capacitors that could store the average lightning strike and chunky copper bus bars you could run a passenger mono-rail on. It still weighs 44Kg, it's still the size of most Krells, still has hawser-sized speaker binding posts, and still offers a solid 160W per channel. I fell in love with this beast a few years back, bordering on selling the then current amps to fund two M25s to bi-amp my speaker system. The problem was that it just lacked balanced XLR inputs... and still does.

One interesting facet of the M25's design is what NAD terms Powerdrive. This circuit engages a second high-voltage rail that nearly doubles the continuous power on a short-term dynamic basis for huge peaks. It was this dynamic aplomb, along with a penchant for an energetic and up-front presentation, that made the M25 thoroughly addictive with pretty much any sci-fi/action/adventure blockbuster ever made.

For those of a 'nervous about my expensive loudspeakers' disposition, the M25 also offers a switchable soft clipping feature. If you are completely barking mad and/or stone deaf and want to drive the M25 to its limits, this feature offers gentle 'peak' clipping rather than full-scale distortion. Given the M25s power and current reserves, you would probably be picking bits of speaker driver out of the sofa first. As I cautioned last time I reviewed the M25, if you see the soft clipping light illuminate, seek urgent medical attention.

M is for mature

The previous Masters Series setup was a strap-yourself-in-for-a-ride winner from the very first disc. Big, bold and brazen-sounding, if lacking in subtlety as a whole. The new M56, M15HD, M25 setup loses little in raw drive and energy but adds a layer of class and refinement to elevate the system into the next league. It has masses of energy – cranking up the volume with Michael Jackson's *This Is It* Blu-ray is still likely to see even elderly relatives moon-walking across the room and grabbing their crotch – but the difference now is

Specifications

M15 HD processor

Dolby True HD: YES
DTS HD Master Audio: YES
THX: NO Badge-hunters look elsewhere
Multichannel pre-out: YES 7.1 phono
Multichannel input: YES 7.1 phono
Multiroom: YES main plus 2 zones
AV inputs: YES 4 x S-video, 4 x phono audio, 8 x digital audio (4 x coaxial, 4 x optical)
HDMI input/output: YES 4-in, 1-out
Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Component: YES 3-in, 1-out
Dimensions: 435(w) x 145(h) x 385(d)mm
Weight: 22kg
Features (with modules as tested): Modular design; Audyssey MultEQ XT; MultEQ Pro; 4 x 12V triggers; Ethernet; RS232 port; Silicon VXP processor; MP data port; PC programmable remote; second zone remote; 192kHz LPCM output

M25 power amp

Power: 7 x 160W
Inputs: 7 x analogue phono
Dimensions: 435(w) x 215(h) x 495(d)mm
Weight: 43.7kg
Features: 160W x 7 with Powerdrive high-voltage power rails to increase peak power; mixed metal materials for chassis and case; Holmgren transformer; seven discrete mono amplifiers; switchable NAD soft clipping feature; 12V trigger.

M56 Blu-ray player

Upscaling: YES All resolutions up to 1080p24
Multiregion: NO Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
HDMI: YES Version 1.3
Component: YES 1 output
Multichannel analogue: YES 7.1 phono outputs
Digital audio: YES Optical and coaxial outputs
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO Neither supported
Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES BD-Live
Dimensions: 435(w) x 114(h) x 272(d)mm
Weight: 14kg
Features: Built-in Wi-Fi, Ethernet port; USB 2.0; DivX HD, JPEG, MP3 playback; super fast disc loading

that they would be wearing a white glove and leather trousers, too. It's all in the detail.

The previous system found adrenaline at the slightly ragged edge of perfection, sacrificing finer details for plenty of character and a party disposition. The Masters Series has grown up now, replacing a bit of its wild-eyed youthful exuberance with an altogether more civilised sound. Dialogue is laid slightly further back in the mix but never shouts at you, effects are rich and textured as opposed



Heavy metal:

The M25 amplifier (bottom) weighs an impressive 43.7kg

to simply crushing, and the overall balance is a little darker and more sophisticated.

As the M25 is the same beast, the sonic differences are largely down to the M15HD processor and its new high-end components. This justifies the financial jump from old to new with ease.

As for the picture, semi static scenes and cut-shot pictures have all the depth, colour and raw contrast one has come to expect from top-flight Blu-ray players. It is a little shy of the range-topping Denon and Pioneer decks in terms of absolute image parameters but it gets very close for around half the price of those machines. A run-through of Pixar's *Up* on Blu-ray (rapidly becoming one of my favoured test discs) provided a veritable cornucopia of colour and shading, with Carl's facial detailing and expressions making the poignant parts of the film all the more heart-rending. Meanwhile, the shaggy fur on Dug the dog's coat was rendered rich and lifelike, and the interior of Munt's airship was suitably Victorian and moodily-lit with plenty of texture on the walls and floor.

However, the M56 is not all roses. In my opinion, its motion-processing is well below the upper echelons of the Blu-ray spinning elite. Big, complex pans lack the silky smoothness of the very best players and even the scrolling credits at the end could be a little more liquid and less jarring. Having swapped cables, processors, players and even video displays to assess where the issue lie, the root cause fell firmly

at the feet of the M56. The motion-processing is about on par with the PS3 playing a Blu-ray, which, while not unwatchable, isn't anywhere near what I would expect for a £2,000 machine.

Thankfully the audio dynamite of the M15HD/M25 pairing more than makes amends for minor picture issues, and a whole evening feature-film fest of *The Matrix* followed by *The Fifth Element* followed by *Serenity* got two thumbs up. **The oomph and dynamic power of the M25 works perfectly with the poise and detail of the M15HD**, offering excellent emotional involvement at low-level listening, and an epic visceral experience at higher volumes. The taxi-chase scene at the beginning of *The Fifth Element* is fast-paced and furious with huge bass and a thumping Brazilian rhythm. You can't help but get lost in the thrill ride, with subtle effects etched into the mix. The detritus clattering around the inside of the cab is understated and oft drowned out by the cab's engines and music beat, but the Masters Series makes sure you can hear every click, pop and scrape.

M is for Mmmmmm

So, NAD's new Masters Series trio generally stands up extremely well for its £8,600 asking price, and the build quality fights on a higher level still – note that the amp and processor are almost twice as heavy as Onkyo's top-end equivalents and the M56 is some five times the mass of Onkyo's BD-SP807 player.

The M15HD's modular design could also offer a lower-cost upgrade route into the future of home cinema, and the overall package has a refinement that was a little lacking in previous incarnations. The M15HD polishes the original diamond's roughness without losing too much of its inherent audio sparkle – the system is still a beast when it comes to dynamic aplomb and sheer audio thrills. Sadly the M56's motion-processing lets the side down and stops me unreservedly recommending the whole trio, although the rest of this player's picture parameters were top-notch. NAD's heavyweight amp and slick processor, however, can easily be considered Best Buy products – run, don't walk, to your local NAD dealer today and get yourself an audition.

Power consumption: Watts NAD M15HD/M25

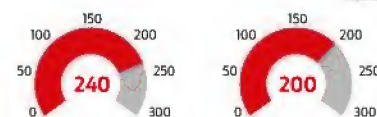


Idling: Our advice is not to leave this combo switched on overnight

Powered: In 8-channel mode, consumption gives an idea of the meat of this beast

Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.1% THD)

M25

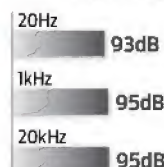
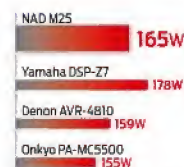


2-channel 8Ω: This two-channel performance is over the manufacturer's own spec by some degree

5-channel 8Ω: It's a similar situation with five channels driven

Untainted: Watts

Signal/noise: dB M15HD/M25



Fidelity firewall: Our measurement of 165W (8Ω, 0.01% THD) is highly commendable

S/N tests: Excellent noise measurements across the board

Audio Jitter: Ps

Loading: Boot/Java M56



Analogue: This jitter figure is somewhat higher than we'd expected, but not a notable problem

Disc loading & Java: Make no mistake, this is one of the quickest BD decks we've ever tested

HCC VERDICT

NAD M15HD/M25/M56
£8,600 Approx

Highs: Innovative modular design; fantastic audio performance; heavyweight build; Wi-Fi BD link

Lows: Average Blu-ray motion processing; no balanced XLR inputs or height/width processing

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



A new generation of Yamaha AV Receivers: Hear the bigger picture

From a company that consistently achieves 5-star ratings and rave reviews for its AV Receivers and, indeed, Hi-Fi equipment, you'd expect their latest home cinema range to tick a lot of boxes. And you'd be right.

The new, 3D-Ready* RX-V367 features 1080p-compatible HDMI, YPAO sound optimisation and Yamaha's unique Cinema DSP. Rich, powerful Yamaha sound, courtesy of five channels each rated at 100W RMS and 192 kHz/24-bit Burr Brown DACs on all channels.

In short, it's exactly what you'd expect from a state-of-the-art, quality AV Receiver made by a world-leading manufacturer.

But there's one feature you'd never dare expect in such a highly specified unit. And that's the price. The brand new Yamaha RX-V367 costs just £200 or less. Popcorn anyone?

Discover more at uk.yamaha.com



* HDMI 1.4 3D feature will be available via firmware update



av·hi-fi

Powered by music

The MSI-HD makes browsing files a painless experience



Media marvel

High-end home media servers can change how we enjoy video and music.

Steve May takes a step upmarket to sample the class-leading MSI-HD

The MSI-HD represents the current pinnacle of the media server market. It's intended as a direct challenger to the Kaleidescape system which has been a consistent hit with custom installs, trumping it with extra features and functionality including the ability to rip Blu-rays.

The system is (initially) a two-box proposition. Content is stored on the XIVASafe hard drive array. You can choose how much storage and protection you want. Options typically vary from 3TB to 12TB, although it is infinitely scalable. Note that the XIVASafe unit is usually hidden away in a rack in a boot room, not in your viewing space.

The MSI-HD can't be used with an inexpensive off-the-shelf NAS, although it will run from an external eSATA drive. One obvious consequence of this is that you are locked into the Imerge storage ecosphere, which has a somewhat rarefied atmosphere. The company would argue that a solid benefit is that it's the equivalent of placing your content under rigorous protection.

The MSI-HD is what sits in your living room. It's relatively large, sounds like a well-behaved PC and has a slot-loading drive for ripping media. At its simplest, this hooks up to your AV system via HDMI and talks to the XIVASafe over Ethernet.

AV/CV

Product:
CD, DVD, and
Blu-ray media
server

Positioning:
High-end server
aimed primarily
at the custom
install market

Peers:
Kaleidescape
system; DF
Solutions BASE
media server

You can then add additional, smaller client boxes in other networked locations. Seven simultaneous streams are currently supported from the XIVASafe.

The unit ships with a standard remote, although I suspect many would prefer to control their systems via iPhone/iPod Touch. An Imerge Controller app is available from the iTunes store.

Not just another jukebox

The joy of the MSI-HD is its interface. The gorgeous hi-res cover-art grid for music and movies is seductive and very intuitive to use. It's similar to what you would see using YAMJ (Yet



→ Specifications

Connections: HDMI v1.2; component; optical digital output; coaxial digital output; eSATA port; Gigabit Ethernet; RS232 serial port (XIVA-Link control protocol); composite AV/S-video output

Features: Integrated CD, DVD, Blu-ray ripper (additional software required for the latter); Wolfson Delta-Sigma 24bit DACs

Video file support: DVD Video (VOB), Blu-ray (.ISO)

Audio file support: WAV MP3; AAC; WMA (non-DRM); CD (from drive)

Dimensions: 430(w) x 98(H) x 326(d)mm
Weight: 10.6kg

Available configurations: 2TB eSATA; XS2i 2TB; XIVASafe XS6i 6TB; XIVASafe XS12i 12TB – iSCSI RAID 6 dual redundancy/eSATA RAID 1 mirrored; dual redundant power supplies

Another Music Jukebox) but with much more polish. This interface sits on top of the standard Imerge admin UI, which I suspect you'll use a lot, editing details of your media. Thankfully, it's fast and easy.

At the heart of the ripping process is the unit's ability to sort metadata and grab cover art. For greater reliability, the MSI-HD integrates three metadata sources. It'll scour GD3, AMG and Gracenote databases for info and art; there's also a unique upload tool, which allows individual users to upload details of obscure discs to a special Imerge-GD3 database themselves.

To challenge the ability of the MSI-HD to correctly identify ripped video media, I loaded 20 discs (DVD and BD) from my collection at random. Only around half were correctly tagged. This may say more about my own collection than the MSI-HD, though.

There's something satisfying about ripping discs. Once you've moved your favourites to a server, you'll start to search nooks and crannies for other discs long forgotten. And once you've got your stuff online, it's easier to browse. This

Out of sight: The XiVASafe would typically be stored in an AV rack in a boot room

is the case with both music and video. Pawing through shelves of CDs is a time-consuming solo chore, whereas viewing the same number of discs via a gallery on a TV takes a fraction of the time and is more of a social experience.

The MSI-HD allows you to rip a CD in a variety of compression modes and formats (MP3 up to 320kbps, WAV, or WMA up to 128kbps). Once ripped, albums or tracks can be played individually or put into a Play Queue. You can also access your music collection via iTunes, making transfer to iPod relatively straightforward.

Video discs aren't compressed during the process. What you get is an ISO copy, complete with menus and extras. The value of video on a server is slightly different from CD, in that it's less likely to get repeated play. There are perennial favourites when it comes to movies, but for the most part, films appear on a server and stay there until everyone is done with

them. Yet I still have discs sitting on shelves in shrink-wrap years after buying them, and ripping these is like releasing friends from captivity.

Once backed-up, video content can be displayed by title, genre, director or year.

The MSI-HD is **the first unit for the dedicated server market that will also rip Blu-rays**. It can't do this out of the box, although your dealer will be able to enable this. Within AACS copyright control protocols, there is a provision for moving content onto a home server. Called Managed Copy, it authorises disc owners to download HD file copies for personal use. This has yet to be implemented by either Hollywood or the major CE companies. The fudge employed here is an effective workaround.

The size of the average BD disc means that the ripping process is longer, around two hours, and there's a significant penalty on storage

Intuitive:

The cover art gallery and XiVA Store are simple to use



I'd also like to see a visualiser when playing music. The MS1-HD has the high-res chops to do it, so why not?

space. With a 12TB XIVASafe, you can still only store around 300 Blu-rays. This compares to 1,800 DVDs.

As with DVDs, pick the cover art from the gallery and the title loads and plays. It's just as if the platter was there, with caveats. Firstly, BD-Live doesn't function. More significantly, the MS1-HD can't bitstream out high-res DTS HD MA or Dolby TrueHD audio tracks. You'll get DTS or DD 5.1 instead. Neither can the MS1-HD internally decode HD audio to multichannel PCM.

Imerge's Head of Future products, David Reynaga, tells me that later this year a new client for the MS1-HD will be launched which will resolve this. Smaller, quieter, and able to bitstream HD audio, it will join the MS1 family and create new system configurations. Moving the main MS1-HD out of the viewing room in favour of a new, silent client strikes me as no bad thing.

As you might imagine, **you can pull music from the ripped music folder to other devices**, although you can't move other music files into it. These have to be accessed via an Import folder. The ripped video folder, however, is inaccessible.

As I continued to use the MS1-HD, I began to long for more functionality. Not because it's lacking as it is, but because I wanted more reasons to stay within its walled garden. I have a large collection of video files in a variety of formats (MKVs, AVI, DivX etc) and it would be terrific to integrate these within the graphical environment of the server. Using .nfo files and standardised naming structures, it should be possible to identify and tag all sorts of errant video content. As it stands, I need to use another device to access these.

What's in Store?

Intriguingly, unlike other server products, the MS1-HD has aspirations to become a general entertainment hub for the home. Moving beyond a role as mere content repository, it's the first device to provide access to the new XiVA Music Store.

From within the MS1's GUI, you can enter this digital download outlet and browse for artists and albums. Produced in conjunction with 7digital, the media distribution company part-owned by HMV, the store offers around 8.5million tracks in DRM-free 320kbps MP3 format. The user interface is peerless, cleverly using metadata to encourage you to branch from one artist/genre to another.

Tracks can be previewed at 192kbps as you go; these last between 30 to 50 seconds. The cost of music downloads is quite high (typically around £8 for an album). Personally, I'd like to see a subs scheme, either based around B&W's Society of Sound download business model or a streaming option, thrown into the mix.

There's little doubt that Imerge's MS1-HD lives up to its billing as 'The world's most advanced home entertainment server'. It's brilliant fun to use, regardless of your geek-creds. I don't think it's the finished article yet but maybe products like this are always a work in progress. Its limitations with Blu-ray playback will probably have enthusiasts hankering for more able clients to be introduced, and I suspect there are more embellishments coming from Imerge's crack squad of coders. That said, I'm fairly confident that we can officially announce that the high-end entertainment server market has a new king.

**Metadata on test:**

With GD3, AMG and Gracenote metadata sources most music and video ripped to the MS1-HD should be correctly identified, with cover art and information applied to the file. At least that's the claim. To (rather unfairly) test this, a random assortment of (slightly obscure) discs was loaded onto the system. Only half were correctly identified immediately. The majority of those left could be identified with a manual search, but some titles remained anonymous.

Titles ripped and recognised automatically:

Big Man Japan; *Driller Killer*; *The Wolf Man* (1941); *The Rocker*; *Samurai Gun*; *Strictly Come Dancing*; *The Live Tour*; *Shogun's Samurai*; *Planet Hulk*; *Kill Bill*; *Iron Maiden Visions of the Beast*; *Gunslinger Girl* (Anime); *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (obscure 1977 Spanish version starring Kenneth More!)

Titles identified after manual search:

A Bittersweet Life; *Death Note - Relight* (anime); *Tokko: Volume One* (anime); *True Blood: Season 2*; *Wonder Woman* (animated); *Killzone SPL* (HK actioner); *Bitch Slap*

Titles not recognised:

Bruno (box-office hit starring Sacha Baron Cohen); *Mar: Volume 4* (anime); *Blood the Last Vampire*; *Queen Greatest Flix*; *Nicotine Live* (unknown Japanese punk band!); *Tarka the Otter* (classic British weepie)

→ Tech Labs**Power consumption: Watts**

Idling: This figure (which is the same for network playback) is rather high. Switch to the 2W standby mode when it's not in use

Playing/disc-ripping: This calls into effect the unit's CD/DVD drive. The 4W increase is as expected

**HCC VERDICT**

Imerge MS1-HD
From £8,000 Approx

Highs: High-res cover art interface; usability; reliability; XiVA store; multi disc-format ripping

Lows: Limitations with Blu-ray playback; inaccessible video folder; somewhat noisy

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

3D LIVE

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3D REVOLUTION

THE MOVIES! THE FACTS! THE FUN!



PROMOTION

ONCE YOU'VE
READ ABOUT
3D, WHY NOT
GO AND SEE IT?



The Panasonic Store network has launched a Full HD 3D Roadshow across the UK, meaning you can experience the new 3D technology at first hand. Running until the middle of July, the roadshow will take place simultaneously in six regions to bring Panasonic's state-of-the-art Full HD 3D theatre pod (pictured) to a shopping centre near you. Pop along to get a taste of the 3D content that is available, and enjoy expert buying advice from your local Panasonic Store.

Go to
www.panasonic.co.uk/3D
to find your nearest venue

EXCLUSIVE TO
Panasonic
STORE

Discover Full HD 3D

with this exclusive pocket guide



TV tuner goes wireless

Jim Hill discovers a neat device that turns PCs into TVs without cables



→ Specifications

Tuners: 2 x DVB-T
HD Ready: Not in UK, DVB-T1 regions only
Software: EyeTV 3 (Mac), THC for Media Center (PC)
System requirements: Intel CPU, OS X 10.5.8 or later (Mac) or 2GB Intel CPU, Windows 7 (PC)
Connections: Terrestrial aerial input; Ethernet
Dimensions: 119(w) x 119(d) x 23(h)mm
Weight: 2.62kg

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



In standby:
 The Elgato eats less than 1W in standby mode

Powered:
 This is a harmless figure, but remember you'll be running your PC/Mac, too

AV/CV

Product:
 Wireless digital TV tuner for Mac or PC

Position:
 The top product in Elgato's TV tuner stable

Peers:
 Elgato EyeTV DTT Deluxe; Pinnacle PCTV HD Mini Stick; HDHomeRun Network Digital TV Tuner

Apple fanboys already love Elgato's sublime USB TV adapters that turn Macs into powerful hard drive-packing TVs, but this Windows-compatible tuner takes a big step forward. Connecting directly with your aerial and wireless router, it sends crisp Freeview images to all the computers on your network.

This simple-looking box contains two DVB-T tuners and has connections for a terrestrial aerial and network cable. The hard work is done by your computer's processor, while the buffering and recording is all dumped on its hard drive. All you see is the superb EyeTV software interface (Mac) or TerraTec's Home Cinema software or Windows Media Center (PC).

It's all about convenience, so setup is just a case of plugging in the terrestrial aerial and network cable, loading the software, and logging your computer on. An unobtrusive control panel will pop up alongside your video window, which can, of course, fill the whole screen.

With two tuners you can record two shows at once, or two users can log in and surf channels. EyeTV and TerraTec Home Cinema both rely on an (included) tvtv subscription to fill

the 14-day EPG with data. Windows Media Center gets more basic info from elsewhere. Features like series linking require the tvtv subscription, but basic EPG info is available even after your subscription has run out. Recordings can then be easily exported into Toast or its PC equivalent for burning onto disc, or converted for watching on a PSP, iPod, or Apple TV.

Wireless hookup was solid: with a reasonably up-to-date laptop and a robust home network you shouldn't see any freezing or fuzzing. Just make sure you have enough hard disk space for the buffer, or point the software to an external drive for whole films.

With no quality settings you see just the same lossless video stream, which looks crisp and well resolved. The big catch is that you only have SD channels to choose from. It can readily receive and record an HD DVB-T1 signal in its native Germany (and the rest of the world), but not in the UK, where we use DVB-T2 for HD.

Elgato's device is the easiest way to get TV onto your home computers, bar none. But in a world of free HD broadcasts, this SD device is also a little frustrating ●



HCC VERDICT

Elgato EyeTV Netstream DTT
 £230 Approx

Highs: EyeTV software interface; setup and use; SD quality

Lows: Incompatible with DVB-T2 HD; demanding of your network and PC

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

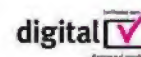
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Diamond geezer

John Archer has his home cinema experience transformed by a remarkable high-contrast projection screen



AV/CV

Product:

High contrast, high brightness screen with ultra-controlled light dispersion for boosting projector use in ambient light, or rooms with light reflection

Positioning:

Two Black Diamond II versions: the 0.8 gain version tested, and a brighter 1.4 gain model. Other options include curved, rear projection, motorised

Peers:

Monaco XScreen – another high-reflectivity model with a solid glass-based screen

We put lots of projectors through their paces in *HCC*, but we don't often cover the 'other half' of the projection story – screens. And for good reason: screens are generally – in any serious cinema room – picked very carefully from a vast series of different screen material/size/mounting options to best suit the specific demands of both your projector and your room setup. In other words, individual screens can be too specific in their focus to justify extensive coverage.

The Black Diamond II from US firm Screen Innovations, however, is different. This screen's properties give it the potential to transform – at a surprisingly low cost – almost any projector set up. In fact, the Diamond can even become a more affordable alternative to a giant plasma or LCD screen, such as Panasonic's £50K 103in TH-103PF9.

The single biggest reason for this is that the Diamond claims it can increase projector contrast by a whopping 300 per cent – or more. Clearly, this can result in either huge leaps in brightness and punch with the images reproduced by any projector, or an image bright enough to be enjoyable in far more ambient light than is normally acceptable.

You might expect a screen with such prodigious reflective properties to be an entirely rigid affair – think again. The Diamond uses dark grey/black 'fabric', which enables it to ship as a roll, and while at the time of writing it's only available in a fixed-frame setting, it will be fitted to motorised/electronic screen mechanisms before the year's out. ➤

→ Specifications

Gain: 0.8 (tested) or 1.4 options available

Mounting options: fixed frame; motorised application due later this year

Maximum size without seam:

113in diagonal (98.5in horizontal)

Features: Advanced reflective layer, ultra-controlled light dispersion, high brightness uniformity when viewed straight on, 300% contrast boost, multiple advanced optical laminations construction



None more black: Screen Innovations claims its dark fabric can boost contrast by up to 300%

At this point, you're probably wondering how Screen Innovations has conjured up a screen with such unusual properties. But, with patents still pending, if I told you how it was done, I'd have to kill you.

The most I can say without the lawyers knocking is that it's a non-polarising system that uses a formulation of seven optical laminations, including an advanced reflective layer – a structure which helps it deliver exceptional control of its light dispersion pattern.

Back at you

In other words, while light bounces back from typical projector screens in a wide, scattershot pattern, lighting up the ceilings and walls of a lightly decorated room and thus reducing the quality of the image on the screen, the Diamond focuses the light straight back towards the projector/you.

Other things this high-contrast projection screen prides itself on include compatibility with 4K x 2K (or higher!) and Full HD

3D signals, and exceptional brightness uniformity.

The screen can extend to a maximum 16:9 screen size of 113in diagonally (98.5in horizontally) without a seam, and comes in two gain versions: a 1.4 high brightness version, and the 0.8 version I tested, for people with darker rooms who love black level response.

The second I fired pictures from a SIM2 C3X Lumis Uno projector at the Diamond, my eyes widened, my jaw slackened and my speech became little more than grunts and squeaks.

The screen didn't just deliver an incremental improvement on the experience of watching films in my test room; it was truly transformative.

The first thing I noticed was the lack of 'rogue' light bouncing around. My test room has matte white walls and ceiling, and so with my usual screen – a solid Vutec – powerful PJs like the SIM2 C3X Lumis Uno flood the room with dispersed light.

With the Diamond, though, my usual reflection problems were almost completely removed, thanks to the screen's remarkably focused reflectivity. This means dark parts of the picture are much deeper and more natural, colours look richer, and the image as a whole simply explodes off the screen.

I was also struck by how exceptionally crisp and detailed pictures looked, the brightness and purity of whites despite the dark screen colour, and by how I couldn't see any distracting signs of the texture/fabric of the screen.

Next, while the Diamond's impact on brightness and contrast is profound, it delivers its extra impact without the slightly 'shiny', almost sparkly, finish often witnessed with high-gain screens.

Satisfied with its prowess in a dark room, I turned up my dimmer switches – and was equally amazed by how well the screen's pictures hold up even when the room is flooded with ambient light.

Perhaps the single most exceptional thing about the Diamond is how flexible it is. For while it delivered its most dazzling results with the 3,000 Lumens SIM2 C3X Lumis Uno, it also provided vastly improved pictures in dark room conditions from a £2,800 DLP Vivitek H5080, a £2,500 LCD Epson TW5800, a £1,000 BenQ W1000, and SIM2's LED debut, the 800 Lumens, £16K MICO 50.

Before you rush off to buy a Black Diamond II, though, there are a few issues to consider.

Firstly, regarding the screen's potential as a giant plasma replacement in bright rooms, the punch it delivers in such circumstances inevitably depends on the brightness of your projector.

Please note, too, that while the screen handles general ambient light brilliantly, it's – understandably – unusually reflective of light sources that sit directly opposite it.

Limited viewpoint

Another important point is that the Black Diamond II has a rather limited viewing angle. Look at the screen from around 40–45 degrees to the side or 20 degrees or so above or below it, and the image's brightness diminishes rapidly, as well as losing uniformity. This is reduced on the 1.4 gain version, however.

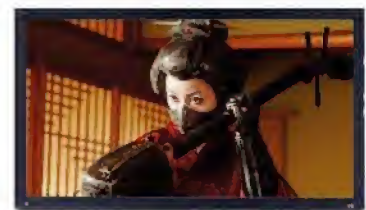
People wanting to mount a speaker behind their screen, meanwhile, should note that the screen isn't acoustically transparent. Finally, I felt that the Black Diamond slightly exaggerated cheap single-chip DLP projectors' rainbow effect issues – though the improvements it brings elsewhere still easily win out unless you're really exceptionally sensitive to rainbowing.

The bottom line here, though, is that if you want to set up a home cinema room but are hampered by ambient light, or you just want to drastically improve your projector's performance in a typical home cinema environment, then the logic-defying Black Diamond II must be seen to be believed ●

Playing Uno

SIM2's latest addition to its C3X Lumis stable is truly state-of-the-art

Retailing for a reassuringly expensive £19,000, the SIM2 C3X Lumis Uno is yet another premium-grade projector from the celebrated Italian brand. With connective options including twin HDMI inputs, three 12V triggers and RS232, it's ready to take centre-stage in a high-end home cinema, and its exhaustive control options over just about every aspect of the picture (gamma, colour management, contrast, frequency/phase, etc) should make it capable of delivering stunning pictures. Check back next issue for a full review...



HCC VERDICT

Screen Innovations Black Diamond II: £2,329–£3,150 Approx

Highs: Light focusing ability; uniform brightness; value; improvements with huge range of projectors; usable in ambient light

Lows: Limited effective viewing angle; exaggerates rainbow effect

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Nuclear sub

Adam Rayner goes berserk with the most powerful active subwoofer ever built...



Really big subwoofers are my guilty pleasure, and I've tested some doozies in my time. Yet above a certain level, you have to go visit them if you don't own a house big enough. So I had to head to the recent Sound & Vision show in Bristol to review a subwoofer so huge it might have been an issue getting it installed in my house. The beast in question? Paradigm's extraordinary Signature Sub 2.

This wasn't necessarily because of its physical size (it's not as massive as, say, SVS' cylindrical PC13-Ultra) but because it weighs over sixteen and a half stones – or over 100kg if you're one of those metric types.

The Signature Sub 2 is a stumpy hexagonal spud with three faces with grilles and three that are

just wood panels. Under each grille reside two 10in woofers, making this a six-driver subwoofer. Also, **these drivers are as defiantly bonkers as any I've met** – what I call 'weapons-grade' woofers. Each has two corrugated bottom suspensions called a spider, and the top roll surround suspension is very special. The latter was designed by an engineer who mused while he shaved that the gooseneck support of his shaving mirror kept roundness even as it bent in all directions. His wife thought he was doing a nutter-out-of-*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* thing, mumbling to himself while shaving. But it resulted in the Signature Sub 2's Finite Element Analysis (FEA)-

optimised mega-rubbery injection moulded suspension.

Add in the ten-layer long-excursion voice coils, and it means that a megalomaniacal 4,500W continuous power amplifier can be hooked up to the speakers, which is what Paradigm has generously shoved inside its flagship woofer. Yet the cabinet is so well self-damped with equal and opposite forces that you can place a glass of water on top of it and see how it doesn't ripple the water while it booms.

How low can you go

The performance figures of this atom bomb of a woofer are worth stressing. It'll drop as low as 7Hz, will hit 112db at a 10Hz cycles and can raise 126dB at 60Hz.

Wolf in sheep's clothing:

In its black gloss finish, the Signature Sub 2 looks harmless enough, but inside (far right) it packs a sextet of 10in drivers

The sub could even double as a bit of designer furniture

AV/CV

Product: Absurdly monstrous and profound in output, this has extreme 10in transducers on 4.5 kilowatts

Position: The biggest baddest subwoofer from the top range of a very high-end speaker maker

Peers: Wilson Audio Thor's Hammer; Krell Master Reference subwoofer; Adire Audio Parthenon

Paradigm's public demos were impressive, and allowed me to feel the taut accuracy of the bass and appreciate the room correction system from fellow Canadians Anthem. When lunchtime came I was allowed to play about with it myself. A few stalwarts stayed despite a warning. Like Jeremy Clarkson that time he blew the tyres on the Bentley, I unleashed hell upon it.

My test disc was *More Bass, More Boom, More Bottom*, a brilliant CD which drops right down to below 10Hz. It begins with an American-accented voiceover warning you about stuff, segues into curse-ridden rapper-style cautions, and then tries to launch the cones out of your subwoofer.

I cranked the living heck out of the front end to 15dB above the point the Paradigm team felt was 'maximum' for public demos. **The track wobbled, yet the Sub 2 ate it for lunch.** The resident projector screen started to flap visibly as the room over-pressured. The air vent in the concrete ceiling began to rattle, growl and drop dead flies and debris on the heads of those below, and I saw fear in the eyes of the present public. It was embarrassing but felt good, and I did it for you.

I was a bit ashamed for inflicting this upon the Paradigm chaps, including their Marketing Manager Mark Aling, over from Canada.

Looking up, expecting a negative response to my behaviour, all I got was sardonic amusement and a request for a copy of the disc!

No limits

The simple fact is I couldn't stress this product in any way. You will reach the limit of what you think is sane far sooner than you will find any limit in the Signature Sub 2. It's an absolute Reference Status subwoofer, and I love it. Of course, at £7,250, it's priced at the upper end of home cinema gear and may be out of your price range. The good news is that Paradigm also makes the £3,500 Signature Sub 1, which uses 8in drivers instead of 10in ones and 'only' 1,700W of power, in the same super-high-quality enclosure and with equal attention to detail.

→ Specifications

Paradigm Signature Sub 2 subwoofer

Drive units: Six x 10in mineral-filled polypropylene cones with 3in, ten-layer voice coils and dual spider suspensions and 10.5kg magnets

Enclosure: Sealed, with drivers pointing out in three directions

Frequency Response: 7Hz to the

35-150Hz crossover point, as selected

On-Board Power: 4,500W RMS, 9,000W peak Class D amplifier

Dimensions: 604(w) x 622(h)

x 578(d)mm

Weight: 105.7kg

Connections: Stereo phono or LFE input, plus balanced XLR input and USB input for use with the brand's PBK-1 Perfect Bass Kit room EQ



HCC VERDICT

Paradigm Signature Sub 2
£7,250 Approx

Highs: Limitless power; huge speed; awesome control; beautiful engineering

Lows: Costly; spoils your enjoyment of lesser systems; risks genuine structural damage

Performance: 12345

Design: 12345

Features: 12345

Overall: 12345



Towers without power

This 5.1 BD system is good-looking, but lacks grunt, says **Adrian Justins**

AV/CV

Product:

5.1 Blu-ray home cinema system

Positioning:

Mid-range all-in-one amongst a bevy of Blu-ray equipped 2.1 and 5.1 systems ranging from £400 to £700

Peers:

Sony BDV-470SF; Samsung HT-BD2; LG HB905PA

Styled in gloss black, this Panasonic's unremarkable main unit could easily pass for a bog standard Blu-ray deck. But the SC-BT330 brings a number of multimedia experiences to the party, including VieraCast 'net video, DLNA networking, SD card playback and a built-in iPod/iPhone dock. Throw in a 5.1 speaker system with 7.1 virtual surround, the latest HDMI with audio return channel and the option to upgrade to Wi-Fi rear speakers and Wi-Fi networking and you have a system with more cutting-edge features than a chain saw factory.

The speaker array comprises a pair of skinny tallboys, a side-firing sub, a diminutive centre and pair of bookshelf rears. All very tidy and unimposing. Equally tidy is the recessed iPod dock, lurking under a flap on the top of the unit.

Hooking up the speakers using the colour-coded bell-wire is a doddle, whilst the only other cables required are HDMI, Ethernet and possibly digital optical connections for a digibox, etc.

Installation is made easy by an auto speaker setup mic and a Smart setup wizard. There are also plenty of tweaks in the menus, such as manually setting the 1080p24 BD output. The remote control seems sensibly laid out and labelled once you get used to the fact that the curious Start button is the gateway to all non-disc menus.

Paired with a Panasonic G20 plasma, the BT330's deck does

a dazzling job. The use of 4:4:4 signal technology delivers beautifully detailed and realistically coloured Blu-ray images whilst standard-definition DVDs come up a real treat.

Of the BT330's multimedia tools I found the VieraCast internet video service limited but efficient. USB playback of JPEGs and MP3s is pretty decent, if clunky to navigate, whilst iPod videos can only be viewed via composite video, which is diabolical.

Sound quality doesn't match the giddy heights of the picture but isn't bad for a 'lifestyle' system. **The best results are achieved with hi-res audio;** *Fantastic Four's* DTS-HD Master Audio mix featured clear dialogue, properly-imaged individual FX and explosions are truly enveloping, as the sub dovetails properly.

There are plenty of other formats to play with, including Dolby Pro-Logic II music and movies, which are fine with, say, a movie on TV but low-res audio sources really show up the limitations of the lifestyle speakers. If you like your sound loud then this isn't the system for you.

Overall this is the marriage of an excellent BD deck to a fairly decent audio system ●

→ Specifications

Video upscaling: YES up to 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES v1.4 with ARC
Component video: NO
Multichannel phono audio: NO
Digital audio: YES 2 x optical input
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES (requires SD card)
Total Amplification: 1,000W
Dimension (main unit): 430(w) x 54(h) x 287(d)mm
Weight (main unit): 3.1kg
Other features: 1080p/24 playback; FM radio; CD playback; DLNA Wi-Fi/Ethernet; iPod dock built-in; VieraCast; BD-Live; AVCHD/MP3/WMA/JPEG/MKV/MP4/DivX/Xvid playback; 2 x USB

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: This tick-over is higher than you'd get from a standalone BD deck

Playing: Our all-channels-driven test makes Panasonic's power output claim of 1kW look a bit optimistic

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

4s

Tray in to main BD menu

65s

Disc loading & Java:
A pretty speedy performer

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic SC-BT330
£500 Approx

Highs: Top-notch BD player; easy to use; multimedia capabilities

Lows: Doesn't like to be driven hard; low-grade speaker wire and terminals

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



The SC-BT330 is neat and tidy

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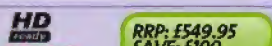
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Anthem to Blu-ray

The brand is making a welcome return to the UK – and on the evidence of its debut Blu-ray player, **John Archer** reckons Anthem is here to stay

At a time when we're slowly but surely seeing brand names disappearing from the AV high street, it's refreshing to be faced with a product wearing one that we don't often see in the UK: Anthem. But its heritage couldn't be more respectable as it comes from the same long-running Canadian stable as Paradigm speakers.

Anthem is already established in the North American home theatre market, with ranges of acclaimed AV amps, processors and pre-amps. But the BLX 200 is the brand's first Blu-ray player.

Its looks speak volumes about Anthem's perceived place in the AV firmament. Though resolutely unstylish, with its chunky body, black finish and straightforward sculpting, it's also impressively robust in its largely metallic chassis, and its size hints at well-

separated components as favoured by the cognoscenti.

Actually, there's likely to be a portion of the *HCC* readership who will lap up the BLX 200's heavy duty, ultra-serious looks. And they will point to the glowing touch-sensitive control buttons on its fascia as a sign that Anthem can also do 'fancy'. But for me, the BLX 200's looks seem rather on the dated side.

Given that it costs a considerable £600, I was also a bit disappointed with its connectivity. Particularly that HD audio can only be output from the deck using HDMI, since it doesn't have any 7.1 analogue audio outputs.

This means that anyone using a relatively old AV receiver can't get the full Blu-ray audio monty from it.

There comes a time where 'legacy' support has to slide on new products, and I suspect that Anthem dreams of the BLX 200 selling in partnership with one of its new AV

AV/CV

Product:
Anthem's first UK AV product is a premium-quality Blu-ray player

Position:
Anthem's only UK Blu-ray deck

Peers:
Onkyo BD-SP807; Denon DBP-2010

receivers, which inevitably boast HDMI inputs.

No wi-fi, no dongle

With many sub-£300 Blu-ray players now offering bewildering levels of multimedia functionality on top of BD playback, meanwhile, the BLX 200 again falls rather flat with quite limited multimedia functions.

For starters, it doesn't have any Wi-Fi system built in, and nor can Wi-Fi be added via any USB dongle.

Next, while the BLX 200 has an Ethernet port, this can only be used to access the standard BD-Live services available to Profile 2.0 players. There's no further online content such as LG's NetCast system, or Panasonic's VieraCast. And nor is there DLNA PC streaming support of the sort finding its way into a growing number of rival Blu-ray decks.

It's aggravating, too, to find that the BLX 200 doesn't carry enough

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling: An ever so slightly high idling figure

Playing: Although disc playback doesn't increase things by much

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: This is an unexpectedly high analogue jitter figure

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

16s

Tray in to main BD menu

59s

Disc loading & Java: Boot speed and tray eject is pretty tardy

Specifications

- 3D:** NO
- Upscaling:** YES all resolutions up to 1080p
- Multiregion:** NO Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
- HDMI:** YES one v1.3 output
- Component:** YES one output
- Multichannel analogue:** NO no stereo phone output
- Digital audio:** YES coaxial and optical
- SACD/DVD-A:** NO/NO Neither supported
- Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding:** YES/YES
- Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream:** YES/YES
- Profile 2.0:** YES
- Dimensions:** 435(w) x 103(h) x 280(d)mm
- Weight:** 4.5kg
- Also featuring:** Playback of audio CD/CD-R/RWs containing MP3, WMA, JPEG, AVI and WMV files, plus DVD-R/RW discs containing AVCHD video; USB playback of MP3, WMA, JPEG and some video files; free USB memory stick; user-selectable 480i/480p/720p/1080i/1080p output; 12bit/162MHz DACs



built-in memory to deliver full BD-Live functionality. You have to add a USB memory stick to make this happen.

Thankfully, for £600, a USB memory stick is included as standard. But having a long USB stick protruding from the BLX 200's fascia is hardly an ideal long-term solution.

It's through the USB port that you can play MP3, WMA, JPEG and selected video files. And the disc tray can handle WMA, MP3, JPEG, AVI and WMV files from CDs, plus AVCHD video stored on burnable DVDs. In a dream world, it would also play SACD and DVD-Audio discs. But it doesn't.

One final moan before checking out the BLX 200's performance concerns its remote, which is about as cheap and nasty as handsets get, and painfully inappropriate for a £600 Blu-ray player.

Thankfully for Anthem, the tone of this review is about to change as I check out the player's performance.

I rate its pictures as outstanding. When run alongside decks like Samsung's new BD-C6900 and Sony's BDP-760, the BLX 200's 12bit, 162MHz video DACs produce pictures that look cleaner, crisper, more colour-rich and even, somehow, more full of contrast than its rivals. **This makes its pictures manna from heaven for bigscreens** and, especially, projectors.

Spreading my comparison a little further, one of Panasonic's latest Blu-ray recorders, the DMR-BW880, pushed the BLX 200 hard for fine

All's square: Anthem's design is strangely old-school

detail and colour accuracy. But for me there was an extra solidity and vibrancy to the Anthem's images that goes a way to justifying its £600 price.

The high video quality extends, too, to its upscaling of standard-def DVDs, which delivers reams of additional sharpness without injecting any significant extra noise.

Its audio is imperious, too, if you can get past the lack of multichannel analogue outputs. Film soundtracks sound fluid, dynamic, and immersive, whether in lossless or lossy DTS/Dolby Digital, and there's an almost inexplicable sense of clarity that you get with genuine 'hi-fi' Blu-ray decks.

Tech tests may show an unexpectedly high analogue audio jitter figure, but as Anthem product manager Nick Platsis told us, the analogue outs are provided mainly as a 'Zone 2' option, and aren't designed for critical listening applications.

The BLX 200 is a warm, engaging player of CDs, too, again justifying the price tag to those rating performance ahead of all else.

For us at HCC, the shortage of multimedia panache makes it impossible for us to award this deck a higher mark than four. And there will doubtless be people nowadays who just won't countenance spending £600 on a Blu-ray player that doesn't offer 3D playback.

But while it's old-school in some ways, the BLX 200 is a reminder that the traditional values of outstanding audio and video performance never go out of fashion ●



HCC VERDICT

Anthem BLX200
£600 Approx

Highs: Picture quality; hi-fi audio; robust and build quality;

Lows: Remote; no built-in Wi-Fi or dongle option; insufficient built-in BD Live memory; lack of multimedia services; no 7.1 line outs

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Life's better when everything works together



Image © dsedigital.com

Imagine having one remote that can:

- control your home theater and dim the lights as the opening credits roll
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- monitor your door locks, lights and security cameras for a little extra peace of mind



Control 

HD for free!

Danny Phillips feeds his TV with Freeview HD from four new set-top boxes. Will one of them be able to stand out from its rivals?

THE TEST

To feed the Freeview HD TV signal to each receiver, we daisy-chained all four using their RF input/loop sockets, and then connected each HDMI output to an Onkyo TX-NR906 AV receiver, switching from one to another for an A/B comparison. We viewed a range of channels on each box, including the three high-definition channels (BBC HD, ITV 1 HD and Channel 4 HD) as well as numerous SD channels.

ICECRYPT T2200

£160 Approx

Icecrypt's T2200 satisfies the hi-def hungry hordes with support for HD video files and other, er, 'cool' features

METRONIC T2 HD

£150 Approx

Metronic's first Freeview box is a straightforward affair, aimed at those who want free hi-def TV without the bells and whistles



HUMAX HD-FOX T2

£180 Approx

The first Freeview HD receiver to reach the market is the most expensive, but lets you stream media files over a wired network

GOODMANS GDB300HD

£150 Approx

Goodmans' neatly-styled GDB300HD puts simplicity and user-friendliness high on the list

The arrival of Freeview HD marks the final stage of high-definition TV's march towards the mainstream. Now you can get scalpel-sharp HD programmes through your aerial without paying for subscription.

Around 50 per cent of UK homes should now be able to receive Freeview HD, with the rest of the country following in line with digital switchover over the next two years. At the moment, three hi-def channels are available (BBC HD, ITV1 HD and Channel 4 HD), but to get them you'll need to upgrade your existing Freeview box to a new DVB-T2-capable receiver – four of which are lined up for this group test.

These receivers are from the first wave of Freeview HD kit to launch the UK, and each one has the power to unlock the potential of your hi-def TV. Question is, which one is most worthy of your wonga?

Design

Straight-up Freeview HD receivers like these are invariably small and

compact due to the lack of disc drives and other space-hogging electronics, which makes them easy to slide into packed AV racks. That said, the designers of these four haven't exactly pushed the boat out – they're all fairly conventional black boxes measuring about two-thirds the width of a typical Blu-ray player.

Goodmans has been the most daring, opting for a slender case with curved corners. A purely decorative silver ring containing four blue lights adorns the centre of the fascia, but that's your lot. It's the only box not to feature a numeric display showing the current channel number. What's more, overall build quality is the worst of the bunch. It's light as a feather and the bodywork is plasticky.

The onscreen menus are excellent, but the nicest touch is the ability to browse channels up to two days in advance using the onscreen banner instead of the eight-day EPG. But hitting the 'i' button only shows details for the current programme on the selected channel, which is a pity.

Also, the banner remembers the last channel you looked at, so at first it might not relate to the programme you're watching.

The Icecrypt's bodywork is much more robust, but the look is old school (those chunky LED digits!). Two things on the fascia catch the eye – the USB port and two CI slots for adding pay TV services.

The UI is also pleasing. The 32bit HD graphics are crisp, modern and icon-driven, and only a fool could be confused by the menu layout. It's also fast when tuning, changing channels and navigating menus.

The EPG takes a distinctive yet user-friendly approach, using a seven-channel grid or an unusual, alternative view that lists the channels in columns. It's superimposed over live TV so there's no mini screen. While I like the design, it's a touch sluggish to respond to the remote.

Also disappointing is that, unlike the Goodmans, the onscreen banner is limited to Now and Next information – no 'on the fly' browsing

ICECRYPT T2200 → £160 Approx → www.icecrypt.com



In brief

This somewhat chunky-looking set-top box outdoes the rival Humax HD-Fox T2 in pure multimedia prowess, adding DivX HD and MT2S to the file format party, yet only via USB – there's no DLNA streaming here, folks. Another feature that may be of importance to you is the CI slot (two of 'em, actually), and Icecrypt is also pledging to add recording to an

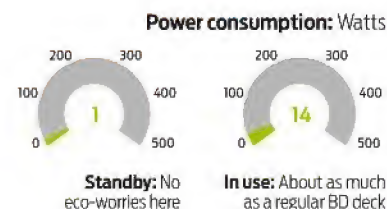
external hard drive later on via a firmware update.

Its lack of onscreen banner browsing is an oversight that hinders usability – you're stuck with Now and Next info if you don't want to call up the full EPG – but thankfully the rest of Icecrypt T2200's menu system is well thought out and nicely designed.

Cool cat:

The Metronic is impressively swift when changing channels and navigating menus

→ Tech Labs



Setup:

Autoscanning of channels
6m 10sec

Tuning: Go put the kettle on, eh?

here. It does, however, include comprehensive details about each broadcast, including the native resolution and frequency.

The HD-FOX T2 offers the best build quality of the bunch, plus a snazzy black finish and silver ring of controls on the fascia. It also offers the best-looking onscreen menus, with bright colours and large text on every page. Helpfully, the main menu is superimposed over live TV and uses a logical left-to-right submenu structure. The EPG plays live TV in the corner and presents programmes in a concise grid.

DESIGN

Round-up: Humax wins the war of the drawing board with solid build quality, sassy looks and gorgeous onscreen graphics. Externally the Icecrypt and Metronic are solid, but the latter is sluggish and basic onscreen. Goodmans' flimsy casing fails to impress but onscreen it's blissfully simple to use

Icecrypt T2200: 1 2 3 4 5

Humax HD-FOX T2: 1 2 3 4 5

Metronic T2 HD: 1 2 3 4 5

Goodmans GDB300HD: 1 2 3 4 5

At 40mm high, Metronic's box is the slimmest of the bunch and is a good-looking unit, except for the shouty red digits in the dated LED display. And while it's far from disastrous, the Metronic's operating system is the clunkiest of the quartet. The onscreen menus are basic, sporting a simple blue box designed to look like tabbed folders, but the structure is muddled and sluggish.

The eight-day EPG should be praised for packing 10 channels into the grid and listing all the options clearly at the bottom, but it doesn't play live TV and scrolling is like wading through treacle. The onscreen banner is also poor, showing only the names of the now/next programmes but not the synopsis.

As for remotes, Humax's zapper may be massive but button layout is immaculate, plus the gloss black finish and silver menu controls make it coffee table-friendly. Goodmans' simple, friendly handset comes a close second but Icecrypt's is a cluttered mess. The arched design of

Metronic's clicker will look good on the sofa arm, but its buttons are stiff and awkwardly placed.

Features

What sets these four boxes apart from regular Freeview receivers is their built-in DVB-T2 tuners, which allows them to decode hi-def MPEG-4 broadcasts as well as regular DVB-T, MPEG-2 programmes. All of the boxes can also upscale broadcasts to 720p, 1080i or 1080p, which is useful for matching SD broadcasts to the resolution of your TV, although it can be applied to HD channels, too.

Each has an HDMI output – essential for viewing hi-def – and an optical output for piping sound to your amp digitally. The Goodmans, Humax and Icecrypt are compatible with Dolby Digital Plus but the Metronic only supports Dolby Digital. Additionally, all four sport RF aerial input/loopthrough sockets and an Ethernet port that will provide access to the BBC iPlayer when it comes to Freeview HD later this year. >

HUMAX HD-FOX T2 → £180 Approx → www.humaxdigital.co.uk



In brief

Humax is a leading brand in the set-top box/PVR market, and its HD-Fox T2 gained it further credibility by being the first Freeview HD receiver to hit UK shelves. At £180 it's one of the most expensive models around, but you might consider this reasonable given the additional features on offer, which include networked playback of DivX,

XviD, JPEG and MP3 files (and via USB, too), and the promise of recording to USB via a future firmware update.

Design-wise, it also looks worthy of the somewhat premium price, and this quality feel extends into its onscreen menus, which are clear, colourful and a doddle to navigate.

Foxy lady:

The HD-Fox T2 has the best build quality and onscreen menus of this quartet of Freeview HD receivers

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Setup:

Autoscanning of channels
4m 23sec

Tuning: Quicker than its Icecrypt rival

There are differences though – the Humax, Goodmans and Icecrypt boxes offer two Scarts for simultaneous connection to a TV and recorder, while the Metronic offers one. The Humax is the only box to offer composite and stereo audio outputs.

The Goodmans and Humax both sport USB ports on the back. Goodmans' port can only be used for firmware updates, but Humax's port is a lot more fun, allowing you to play MP3, JPEG and XviD from flash drives. What's more, in the near future, a software upgrade will turn the box into a simple PVR by connecting an external USB HDD.

But the HD-FOX T2's standout feature is media sharing with PCs and NAS drives on a home network through the Ethernet port. Format support is limited to DivX, XviD, MP3 and JPEG and it's a shame there's no Wi-Fi, but its inclusion is a real boon for home networking newcomers.

The Icecrypt T2200 may lack DLNA streaming, but it does embrace a wider range of formats

than the Humax. DivX, AVI, MP3, JPEG and MPEG-4 are supported via USB, as well as high-definition video in the form of DivX HD, MKV and M2TS (the file type associated with AVCHD). Icecrypt also says that a future software upgrade will allow you to record Freeview HD onto an external hard disk and it's also the only box here to offer CI slots, which are not to be sniffed at – particularly with the prospect of Sky Sports 1 and 2 coming to Top-Up TV.

Although all four receivers boast built-in upscalers, Humax and Icecrypt are the only ones that can automatically switch to the broadcast's native resolution (using their 'Original' and 'Auto' modes respectively). The others output everything in the selected resolution.

The Goodmans and Metronic receivers are light on features. Neither offers digital media playback, and Metronic's box doesn't even provide a USB port. This makes them best-suited to people who want uncomplicated access to hi-def TV without any of the trimmings.

They do, however, support the usual Freeview offerings like subtitles, Audio Description, MHEG interactive services and digital text.

Performance

To assess picture quality, we started out by tuning all four boxes to BBC HD and comparing them using our HDMI switcher. Although we'd like to tell you that hi-def picture quality varies wildly from box to box, the truth is that there's very little difference between them – they all handle the channel's mix of pristinely-shot programmes with real depth and intense sharpness. ➤

FEATURES

Round-up: The four receivers offer similar TV functions, but Humax and Icecrypt push the boat out with advanced digital media support.

Iccrypt's handling of MKV and M2TS HD video via USB will appeal to many, but Humax's DLNA streaming is the killer feature

Iccrypt T2200: 1 2 3 4 5

Humax HD-FOX T2: 1 2 3 4 5

Metronic T2 HD: 1 2 3 4 5

Goodmans GDB300HD: 1 2 3 4 5

METRONIC T2 HD → £150 Approx → www.metronic.com



In brief

French manufacturer Metronic may be unfamiliar to some *HCC* readers, but the brand is a quite a large player in the satellite receiver arena, and sells a variety of accessories, too. This T2 HD Zapbox (why 'Zapbox? We've no idea...') offers a no-nonsense design and a very rudimentary feature set, but does

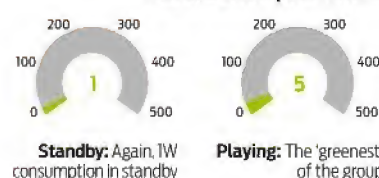
retail for less than many of its competitors, and could easily find itself snapped up by cash-conscious consumers in the predicted pre-World Cup rush. They'll just have to learn to live with its rather over-the-top red digital display and uninspiring looks

Hit the snooze:

This feature-lite but perfectly serviceable STB has a bit of a 'clock radio', feel to its design

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Setup:

Autoscanning of channels

3m 26sec

Tuning: Quite speedy to find channels

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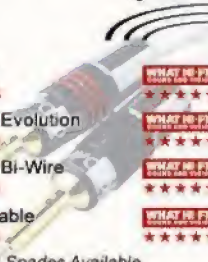
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In each case, HD pictures are immediately striking, boasting natural-looking colours and crisply rendered detail. Their ability to pick out fine textures, from blades of grass in fields to the delicious culinary detail of *Raymond Blanc's Kitchen Secrets*, makes pictures seem remarkably life-like and three-dimensional.

Helpfully, BBC HD shows a test card as part of its preview. All four boxes are able to resolve the finest vertical lines of its frequency response pattern without trouble.

In terms of noise, all receivers display the odd twitch and flicker here and there, but none of the pictures contain excessive artefacts. Edges are emphatically defined, while large swathes of colour contain no smudgy pixel noise or banding. The Icecrypt's HD pictures are perhaps the most satisfying in terms of overall clarity and colour handling, although by no means does it stand head and shoulders above the rest.

However, there are bigger differences between the boxes when

watching SD channels upscaled to 1080p. On BBC 1 and ITV1, Metronic and Goodmans' image quality appears soft, with a fair dollop of mosquito noise moping around edges, most noticeably when dealing with moving objects. Captions also look a little softer than its rivals.

Such artefacts are still present in the Icecrypt and Humax's SD pictures, but they do look a touch sharper and more stable. It's worth bearing in mind that many of the artefacts in any Freeview picture can be attributed to shortcomings in the source broadcasts or the varying bitrates used for different channels.

On the audio side, the Humax sounds clear and dynamic with all of our test programmes. All four boxes in fact deliver speech with authority and cope admirably with the rigours of everyday TV soundtracks, no matter which cable you've connected. Also, remember that you can enjoy multichannel Dolby Digital soundtracks when you connect any of these boxes to your receiver via HDMI or digital audio output.

I plugged the Humax HD-FOX T2 into my home network and was distinctly impressed by the sharp and punchy music playback. What's more, the menu system is fast and loads up MP3 files without fuss – such slick network functionality is a very valuable string to Humax's bow.

Both the Humax and Icecrypt also play back music files from USB sticks and again the quality is terrific. Unlike the Humax, the Icecrypt additionally plays DivX HD and other hi-def videos from USB. We tried out *Elephant's Dream* and a few HD movie trailers and they looked stunningly sharp and glitch-free.

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: As far as high-definition picture quality is concerned there's very little in it, but a strong showing with SD content (which, let's face it, you'll be watching most of the time) reveals the Icecrypt to be the best overall picture performer

Iccrypt T2200: 1 2 3 4 5

Humax HD-FOX T2: 1 2 3 4 5

Metronic T2 HD: 1 2 3 4 5

Goodmans GDB300HD: 1 2 3 4 5

GOODMANS GDB300HD → £150 Approx → www.harvardplc.com



In brief

A receiver identical in specification to models from sister Harvard PLC brands Bush and Grundig, Goodman's GDB300HD catches the eye with its curved-edged design and slim build, and benefits from simple-to-use onscreen menus and excellent EPG features including two-day 'banner browsing'. Like the

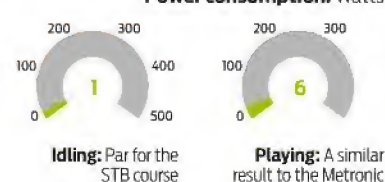
Metronic T2 HD, it skimps on extra-curricular features in favour of keeping costs down. Good news if you're after a frills-free Freeview HD upgrade, but not if you want to dip your toes into the world of multimedia playback or external hard drive recording.

Finishing touch:

The front fascia blue lighting display is just for show

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Setup:

Autoscanning of channels
2m 56sec

Tuning: The quickest of the group test

Final standings

It's early days for the Freeview HD market, but if this first wave of receivers is anything to go by, the future's looking bright, and very sharp indeed. But in any contest there have to be winners and losers – and bringing up the rear is the Metronic T2 HD. It's a perfectly serviceable receiver that delivers crisp, punchy hi-def pictures and sports a delectably slim design, but the onscreen displays, operating speed, features and SD pictures simply don't match up to the quality of the other three.

Taking third spot is the Goodmans GDB300HD, which goes about its business with slickness and simplicity, offering decent image quality along the way. Onscreen banner browsing, a terrific EPG and an intuitive remote also earn it points, but build quality is poor and it lacks some features.

The top spot is a tough call. Both the Icecrypt T2200 and Humax HD-FOX T2



make convincing cases for the gold medal, elevating themselves into contention with enticing features like digital media playback from USB and the promise of future PVR functionality. Both perform well with HD and SD programmes, and the Icecrypt is to be applauded for including hi-def video playback and two CI slots.

But, as an overall package, the Humax convinces most. Its superior remote, usability and external design may seem minor plus points, but they make a real difference in everyday use. However, the addition of DLNA networking is the real clincher, turning the Humax into an effective media streamer. It's the most expensive, but worth every penny ●



HCC VERDICT

Humax HD-FOX T2
£180 Approx

Highs: Build quality; media streaming & USB playback; HD/SD pictures

Lows: No HD video playback; no CI slot

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Tuner: yes DVB-T2/DVB-T

Scart: yes 2 (one RGB)

Component video out: no

USB: yes on the back

HDMI: yes with upscaling to 720p/1080i/1080p

RF input: yes plus loopthrough

Stereo phono output: yes

Digital audio output: yes optical (Dolby Digital Plus)

Ethernet: yes for DLNA

networking, upgrades and future services

CI slot: no

Dimensions: 280(w) x 45(h) x 200(d)mm **Weight:** 1.42kg

Other features: Eight-day EPG; plays media from external USB HDD; network streaming (DivX, MP3, JPEG); MHEG interactive services; Audio Description; subtitles; aspect ratio settings; channel list; favourites; software upgrade by USB & over-the-air



HCC VERDICT

Iccrypt T2200
£160 Approx

Highs: Build quality; two CI slots; file format support; HD and SD pictures; UI design

Lows: Remote; no onscreen banner browsing; sluggish EPG

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Tuner: yes DVB-T2/DVB-T

Scart: yes 2 (one RGB)

Component video out: no

USB: yes on the front

HDMI: yes with upscaling to 720p/1080i/1080p

RF input: yes plus loopthrough

Stereo phono output: no

Digital audio output: yes optical (Dolby Digital Plus)

Ethernet: yes for upgrades and

future services

CI slot: yes x 2

Dimensions: 260(w) x 46(h) x 190(d)mm **Weight:** 1.2kg

Other features: DivX HD, MKV, M2TS, DivX, MP3, MPEG-4, AVI support via USB; seven-day EPG; MHEG interactive services; Audio Description; subtitles; aspect ratio settings; channel list; favourites; software upgrade by USB & over-the-air



HCC VERDICT

Goodmans GDB300HD
£150 Approx

Highs: Distinctive design and UI; solid HD pictures; onscreen banner browsing

Lows: Build quality; soft SD pictures; no USB playback

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Tuner: yes DVB-T2/DVB-T

Scart: yes 2 (one RGB)

Component video out: no

USB: yes for firmware

upgrades only

HDMI: yes with upscaling to 720p/1080i/1080p

RF input: yes plus loopthrough

Stereo phono output: no

Digital audio output: yes optical (Dolby Digital Plus)

Ethernet: yes for upgrades and

future services

CI slot: no

Dimensions: 257(w) x 42(h) x 165(d)mm **Weight:** 0.8kg

Other features: Eight-day EPG; MHEG interactive services; Audio Description; subtitles; first-time install; aspect ratio settings; set reminders; channel list; favourites; software upgrade by USB & over-the-air



HCC VERDICT

Metronic T2 HD
£150 Approx

Highs: Slim design; crisp HD pictures

Lows: Remote; limited now/next banner; soft SD pictures; no USB port; clunky menus

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Tuner: yes DVB-T2/DVB-T

Scart: yes 1 (RGB)

Component video out: no

USB: no

HDMI: yes with upscaling to 720p/1080i/1080p

RF input: yes plus loopthrough

Stereo phono output: no

Digital audio output: yes optical (Dolby Digital)

Ethernet: yes for upgrades and

future services

CI slot: no

Dimensions: 295(w) x 40(h) x 170(d)mm **Weight:** 0.9kg

Other features: Seven-day EPG; low power standby mode with external microcontroller; MHEG interactive services; Audio Description; subtitles; first-time install; aspect ratio settings; set reminders; channel list; favourites

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HCC PROMOTION

Kings of 3D

Samsung's next-gen TVs bring the excitement home in 2D and 3D

HCC's sister magazine *T3* recently took itself down to Stamford Bridge, home of freshly-crowned Barclays Premier League champions Chelsea, to have look at another winning team: Samsung's Full HD 8000 series LED television, which can actually convert 2D visuals to 3D in real-time, and the Samsung HT-C6930W 3D home cinema system, which also offers Full HD 3D Blu-ray tech.

You can see how the team got on at the website www.t3.com/samsung3D, and learn all about the state-of-the-art technology inside this stunning 3D home entertainment setup.

Win!

Get your hands on this entire Full HD 3D setup courtesy of Samsung!

Looking for the best in 3D home entertainment? Look no further: we're giving away a 55in Samsung 8000 LED TV and HT-C6930W home cinema system.

On the 8000, HyperReal 3D Technology continually optimises the performance and image enhancement, giving you the most vibrant and crystal-clear 3D images, and performance in Full HD 2D is also jaw-dropping. Meanwhile, the HT-C6930W provides creative midfield support with High Definition surround sound and Full HD 3D Blu-ray visuals.

For your chance to win, head to www.t3.com/samsung3D

The Ultra Clear Panel on this LED TV efficiently absorbs external light and eliminates reflection, providing you with real, dynamic detail and a more comfortable viewing experience

Immersive High Definition surround sound makes your HD and 3D movie experiences deeper, richer, and more realistic

This Samsung 3D Blu-ray home cinema system provides Full HD 3D 1080p, plus built-in Wi-Fi connectivity with access to Internet@TV, as on the 8000 television

SAMSUNG

Freeview HD gives access to over 40 channels including three HD ones – BBC HD, ITV1 HD and C4HD – free of any monthly subscription. That means you can watch all your favourite shows in hi-def

With Full HD 1080p resolution and LED backlighting, Samsung's LED TVs deliver richer, more realistic images. And Samsung's LED range now offers more screens than its old-style LCD lineup



Samsung's HyperReal 3D Technology continually optimises performance and image enhancement, giving you vibrant and crystal-clear 3D images across its LCD, LED and plasma ranges

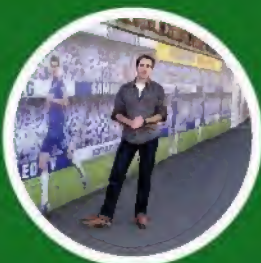
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Stars in their eyes

At the *DTS Home Cinema Choice Awards 2010*, the great and the good in the UK AV industry got a brief opportunity to act like Hollywood stars



This is what it's all about - the golden Starman statuettes so prized by the industry. Hand-made by secretive Swiss craftsmen, they are transported to the venue in a diamond-crusted palanquin guarded by ninja warriors



Celebrity presenter Dominic Holland expresses his deep love of HCC



Home Cinema Choice Editor Chris Jenkins wisely keeps his speech short

Last issue we revealed the winners of the coveted golden Starman statuettes in the *2010 DTS Home Cinema Choice Awards*. With 23 categories ranging from Best Buy TVs and amplifiers to media servers and discs, the Awards celebrate all that's best in AV design, performance and innovation. But the fun doesn't end with the judging; for the lucky winners, there's a day in the spotlight at HCC's exclusive Awards ceremony.

Held again this year in the Apollo Cinema in London's Piccadilly, the Awards were hosted by top TV funnyman Dominic Holland, whose hilarious assault on AV geekiness brought him perilously close to being clubbed to death with the winners' statuettes.

Boasting over 150 guests from the AV industry, the Awards prompted laughter, tears and emotional speeches – it was just like the Oscars, but with cheaper goody-bags.

After the ceremony it was the usual mad dash to the bar for an in-depth analysis of the results, and a good old industry gossip. Here are some of the highlights...



First-time winners Guy and Karin Singleton of ImagineThis look slightly bemused to be collecting their Installer of the Year award from Chris Jenkins and Dominic Holland



Jason Dear (Marantz), Charlie Brennan (Arcam), Neil Wilson (NAD) and Ian Galloway (Yamaha) – all about to be pounced on like wounded gazelles by HCC's flanking predatory ad sales team



Samsung's Simon Storey and Darren Petersen with their Best Hair awards



Sagem's PR collective



Sony's Eric Kingdon collects his award to the tune of the Darth Vader theme



Despite a hellish journey through volcanic ash from Bruges to London, Hall of Fame winner Danny Tack of Philips looks pleased with his two awards – though maybe not so pleased at the thought of the trip home



Denon's Roger Batchelor bends the ear of HCC audio guru Alvin Gold



Denon boss Richard Goodall looks rightly chuffed with a brace of awards



Chris and Dominic put the squeeze on Western Digital's Juliet Ohuaregbe



HCC's Steve May pals up with Sony's Lucie Speciale

The cutting edge of sound

DTS is at the forefront of surround sound technology. *HCC* reveals how the company is pioneering advanced audio formats and moving into exciting new areas

EVERY HOME CINEMA FANATIC KNOWS THAT

sound is half of the movie experience, and no company encompasses enthusiasm for cinema and domestic surround sound more than DTS. Founded in 1993, DTS developed a cinema sound system which added increased bandwidth and greater dynamic range to movie audio. It was launched to great acclaim with the release of Steven Spielberg's dinosaur epic *Jurassic Park*.

In 1996, DTS introduced a version of its system for domestic use, initially on LaserDisc, and since 2008 the company has focused solely on the home entertainment market. Of course, it's the emergence of DVD and Blu-ray which has brought DTS to the attention of most home cinema fans. The lossless DTS-HD Master Audio format has become a default for BD software, and delivers a bit-accurate audio experience.

Adding symmetry

But DTS is not the kind of company to rest on its laurels,

Up and away:
Lossless audio adds even more fun to the Pixar mix



and has developed a number of exciting new technologies to make the most of audio data in a wide range of listening environments.

DTS Symmetry, for instance, will be popular with anyone who has ever jumped out of their skin at a sudden volume change in movie sound, online content, CD listening, or even voicemail. DTS Symmetry balances loudness levels between diverse multimedia sources on your computer, to give a much more pleasant volume level no matter what audio comes in or out. Another DTS product with PC and gaming applications is Neural Surround, which converts seamlessly between stereo and 5.1-channel audio, while DTS Surround Sensation UltraPC creates a virtual surround effect. Also new is DTS Boost, which offers listeners a dramatic increase in perceived loudness from laptop speakers.

Consistently raising the bar in the world of home theatre, DTS looks set to continue delivering the movie experience in its purest form.

DTS formats decoded



DTS Express

DTS Express is designed for network streaming, broadcast and internet applications. Encoded at constant bitrates with up to 5.1 channels for Blu-ray disc, it's commonly used on secondary audio tracks.



DTS Digital Surround

Often featured on DVD releases, most DTS Digital Surround soundtracks consist of 5.1 channels, but can contain fewer; for instance DTS 4.0 can have discrete audio signals for center, left, and right channels, plus a mono signal common to the surrounds. It's encoded at constant bitrates up to 1.509 Mbps.



DTS Digital Surround ES

DTS-ES is used to deliver 6.1-channel audio, and is encoded at constant bitrates up to 1.509 Mbps. It includes two variants, DTS-ES Matrix and DTS-ES Discrete 6.1, depending on how the sound was originally mastered and stored. DTS-ES Matrix provides 5.1 discrete channels, with a matrixed center-surround audio channel.



DTS provides premium-grade audio to match Blu-ray's stunning visuals

Five of the best DTS soundtracks...

The Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy

DTS-HD Master Audio 6.1

The new *Lord of the Rings* Blu-ray boxset is a real show-stopper when it comes to audio impact. Epic in scale, the mixes for all three films are bursting with spatial effects, booming LFE and immersive atmospherics.



Up

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1

The latest Pixar movie doesn't just look great in hi-def, it also sounds superb thanks to the Blu-ray's lossless 5.1 mix. The amount of fine detailing in the DTS-HD MA audio, from creaking floorboards to the squeak of balloons bumping in to each other, is simply breathtaking in its precision and clarity.



Terminator Salvation: Director's Cut

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1

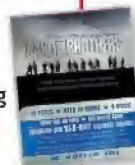
Epic dynamic range and an incredible sense of directional movement make you feel like you're right there, doing battle with Skynet's rampaging robots, in this sci-fi blockbuster sequel.



Band of Brothers

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1

The audio across this epic Spielberg-produced WWII TV series puts many film releases to shame. You'll be diving for cover during the battle scenes as bullets fly past your head and explosions shake you off your chair.



Fight Club: 10th Anniversary Edition

DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1

This amazing soundtrack hits home like Brad Pitt's fist in your face, thanks to the punishing bass and highly aggressive sonic steering. Yet, incredibly, the accomplished mix doesn't lose track of the subtleties that exist within the aural assault.



DTS Digital Surround 96/24

DTS Digital Surround 96/24 offers high-quality multichannel audio on DVDs. Its 24bit depth means it can carry more audio information than 16bit CDs, and the 96KHz sampling rate can capture super high-frequencies. It's encoded at constant bitrates above 1.509 Mbps.



DTS-HD High Resolution Audio

DTS-HD High Resolution is an optional surround sound format for Blu-ray, and an alternative to DTS-HD Master Audio where disc space is short. It's encoded at constant bitrates above 1.509 Mbps and up to 6.0 Mbps for Blu-ray.



DTS-HD Master Audio

Capable of delivering more than 7.1 channels, DTS-HD Master Audio is bit-for-bit identical to the studio master. It's encoded at variable bitrates above 1.509 Mbps, and up to 24.5 Mbps for Blu-ray. It can also downmix to 5.1 and two-channel.

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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **THE WOLFMAN** Remake of '40s werewolf classic aims for the moon **A PROPHET** Cannes corker shines on Blu-ray **THE ROAD** Post-apocalyptic drama in 'low on laughs' shock **MAD MEN: SEASON THREE** Super-stylish in HD **BEING HUMAN: SERIES 2** The worst ever flatshare **THE PRISONER** Less Pat McGoochan, more Cell Block H **AND MUCH MORE!**

It's here!

Avatar → All-region BD

But not in 3D (yet). Turn to p105 to discover whether the 'merely' 2D Blu-ray release of 'the biggest film in the world' will tickle you pink or just leave you blue in the face...

HCC Ratings key

Doctor Manhattan	1 2 3 4 5
Cookie Monster	1 2 3 4 5
Huckleberry Hound	1 2 3 4 5
Papa Smurf	1 2 3 4 5
David Cameron	1 2 3 4 5



'We wanted cash back, Iceland, not ash'
Volcanic clouds kibosh Wolfie's London
tourist photo opportunities



Get out claws

Sink your teeth into this gory, period horror romp on DVD



HCC VERDICT

The Wolfman: Extended Cut
Universal Pictures → R2
DVD → £20 Approx

We say: A good-looking (and better sounding) DVD outing for the re-jigged Wolfman

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Wolfman had the kind of troubled production history that makes lycanthropy look like a doddle. Benicio Del Toro's character Lawrence Talbot only has to deal with turning into a hirsute killing machine whenever the moon is full – this movie had to struggle with its original director dropping out, an endless round of re-shoots and the decision to drop Danny Elfman's score, only to put it back in at the last minute.

The surprising thing then is that the finished feature is pretty enjoyable; a gory period horror romp with an all-star cast, handsome production values and some excellent practical effects from the legendary Rick Baker. But journeyman director Joe Johnston fails to provide any visual panache to match the other ingredients, and there's an over-use of fake-looking CG effects that seem to belong to another film altogether.

Mark Craven: Even in this standard-def incarnation, this big-budget remake looks impressive. Presented anamorphically at 1.78:1 (opened slightly from the original 1.85:1 ratio), the transfer will soon win you over with some impressive detail and an accurate rendering of the rather subdued colour palette. Sadly, the nature of the film's visual style (all moody blacks and swirling

mists) sometimes throws up some serious hurdles that the SD transfer simply can't deal with.

Steve May: The Dolby Digital 5.1 mix of *The Wolfman* is wonderfully, unapologetically melodramatic. The sound design throws in everything from horse and carriages to peeling thunder, while an agile LFE brings growling menace to the mix. The result is a multichannel dog-treat of a soundtrack with creepy crescendos that'll have you yelping in delight.

Against all odds, the score is terrific, too. Elfman's original work was famously replaced with a contemporary alternative from Paul Haslinger, before being (partially) reinstated. Other composers were then brought in to stitch it all together (Elfman was too busy on *Alice in Wonderland*), so it's difficult to know who to credit for what's left, but the end result is a Gothic hoot.

Anton van Beek: As has become common practise with many of the larger studios, *The Wolfman* comes to standard-definition DVD with an extremely meagre collection of extras compared to its Blu-ray incarnation (the latter wasn't available for review prior to release). All that's on offer is a paltry collection of five deleted/extended scenes. It's enough to make you howl at the moon.



Exam

Sony Pictures → Region B BD
£23 Approx



This high-concept, low-budget thriller pits eight candidates against one another in an exam, with the

winner getting a job at a mysterious corporation. The catch? There's only one correct answer, but no question... Writer-director Stuart Hazeldine cranks up the tension as the candidates try to figure out what is going on, but is let down by variable performances and a rather obvious twist at the end. The disc itself features an unexceptional AVC 2.35:1 encode (in 1080i) and regular lossy DD5.1. Extras include a commentary and behind-the-scenes footage. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Valhalla Rising

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£18 Approx



Bronson director Nicolas Winding Refn continues his cinematic meditation on violence with this

gory and surreal art-house movie set during the 12th Century. Mads Mikkelsen plays One-Eye, a former slave and rather handy warrior who joins a group of Vikings who have found Christianity on a journey to the Holy Land. This remarkable film debuts on a superb BD, with phenomenal digital photography providing plenty for the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode to work with. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is equally solid, and the package is rounded out with a *Making of...* and commentary. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Armored

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£23 Approx



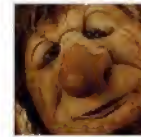
It's been a while since I last saw a good heist movie. Having now watched this new flick from

Predators director Nimród Antal, that situation hasn't changed. I really wanted to like *Armored*, and there is plenty to admire in the performances and the direction. But the story itself is so generic, so predictable that you can never really engage with it. At least Sony's BD features a wonderfully detailed and dimensional AVC 2.40:1 encode, a big, bottom-heavy DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, and a reasonable batch of extras including a commentary and *MovielQ* functionality. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Where the Wild Things Are

Warner Home Video → All-region BD/
R2 DVD → £23 Approx



This children's book adaptation isn't really for kids at all. While little'uns will find much to enjoy

about this tale of a young boy and the monsters he befriends, in the hands of director Spike Jonze it has been transformed into a piece of intriguing art-house cinema. It's a visual treat, too, and the Blu-ray's VC-1 2.40:1 encode is true to the source – right down to the occasional soft shot and a couple of problematic night sequences. Meanwhile, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 is rich and full of stomping bass, and the extras are worth investigating. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

We predict a riot

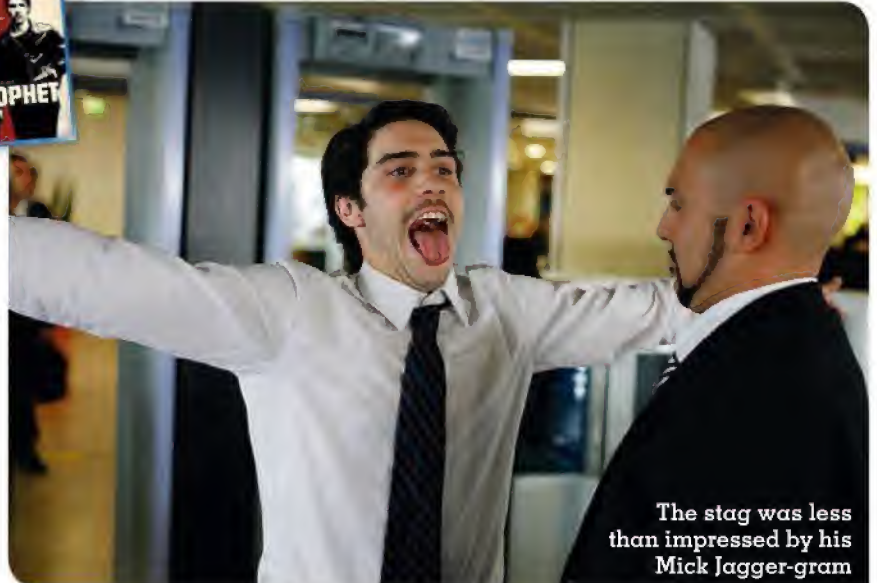
Do believe the hype: one of the best BD flicks you'll see all year

A Prophet has been surrounded by a huge buzz ever since it wowed critics and grabbed the Grand Prize of the Jury at last year's Cannes Film Festival. And remarkably, this French crime drama actually exceeds the hype.

Newcomer Tahar Ramin is a revelation as French-Arab convict Malik, whose six-year incarceration leads him to a terrible decision to ally with the Corsicans who run his prison. What follows is an unpredictable, unforgettable and emotionally draining crime saga, pulled together masterfully by director Jacques Audiard. One of the best films you'll see all year.

Mark Craven: Optimum's Blu-ray release of *A Prophet* packs an AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode that's unlikely to win awards, but which captures the grim and gritty look of the material admirably. The prison interiors, where so much of the story is set, are unsurprisingly dominated by whites, greys and blacks, all buzzing with a finely textured layer of grain. That said, the picture retains an impressive amount of clarity and detail, resulting in a surprising sense of depth. And when the action finally moves outside the prison walls you get the chance to see just how robust the colour presentation is.

Steve May: Hardly an obvious demo disc, but this gritty drama uses the breadth and fidelity of its 5.1 DTS-HD MA soundtrack to create a convincing, claustrophobic world. Much of the weight is across the L/C/R but realistic detail is everywhere. And there's also bold use of dynamics – during a



The stag was less than impressed by his Mick Jagger-gram

siege of an armoured car in one sequence, the gunfire that ensues is brutal.

In addition to the French language DTS track, there is also a stereo LPCM option. Also note that as the picture is framed for 1.85:1, English subtitles sit in the picture area.

Anton van Beek: While it doesn't initially appear to offer a great deal of features, there's a fair amount of depth to the extras that are to be found on Optimum's Blu-ray platter. The best of the bunch are the *Derrière Les Barreaux* – a 72-minute documentary revisiting some of the locations and locals who appear in the film, culminating with a screening of the movie for them – and *Un Prophète à Châtenay* – a 24-min analysis of the making of the film and prison life. Joining them are four deleted scenes with or without commentary (sadly the audio can't be changed on the fly), a 15-minute *Making of...* featurette, five minutes of screen tests, nine minutes of rehearsal footage and the trailer. All extras, except the trailer, are presented in standard-definition.



HCC VERDICT

A Prophet
Optimum → Region B BD
£23 Approx

We say: An impressive hi-def package for a superlative modern thriller

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

End credits

Post-apocalypse movie that's explosive without explosions

The Road is the antithesis of the kind of apocalyptic tales Hollywood typically loves to spin. Adapted from the novel by Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* eschews the reliance on special effects found in soulless blockbusters like *2012*, instead delivering a more affecting, human take on the end of the world. Director John Hillcoat doesn't care how the world ended – it's enough to say that it has as we follow a father and son (Viggo Mortensen and Kodi Smit-McPhee) trekking across post-apocalyptic America simply trying to stay alive and find salvation. The result is a magnificently raw piece of filmmaking that demands to be experienced.

Mark Craven: *The Road's* AVC 2.40:1 encode opens with a burst of colour as bright, vividly rendered flowers and trees fill the screen. It's beautiful stuff, the likes of which will only be seen fleetingly again. For the most part this is a resolutely dark, almost monochromatic movie perfectly suiting its apocalyptic themes. 'Each day is more grey than the one before' says Mortensen's character early in the film, and this BD's imagery hammers the fact home. But if there's not much to talk about when it comes to colour reproduction, detailing is strong throughout – making the most of the dirty, decrepit landscapes the characters inhabit. The amount of post-production colour grading means that the encode doesn't always look natural, but it's never over-processed.

Steve May: For a DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix, *The Road* is surprisingly straight and narrow, focusing almost entirely across the front soundstage. There are some sonic potholes



HCC VERDICT

The Road → Icon → Region B BD
£20 Approx

We say: This uncompromising and chilling apocalyptic drama benefits from a sympathetic Blu-ray package

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

on offer, particularly when unnamed-father and son are caught amid a forest of dying, uprooting trees, but for the most part the soundtrack is monophonic and unapologetically uneventful. The minimal score, by regular collaborators Nick Cave and Warren Ellis, is suitably glum. Unlike the histrionics of *2012*, *The Road* suggests that the end of the world is nothing to get excited about. The result is a soundtrack that's about as much fun as a sleepover in a cannibal's cellar.

Anton van Beek: *The Road* isn't exactly overflowing with extra features – but instead opts for a quality over quantity approach to its bonus material. Director John Hillcoat provides a fascinating chat-track (hidden in the Set-Up menu) that looks at the attraction of the project, the challenges he faced making it and his feelings on the Test Screening process (he's not what you'd call a fan). Video-based extras take the form of a 12min *Making of...* featurette, a 14min interview with the director and a gallery of 36 behind-the-scenes photos and pieces of concept art. The interview and featurette are both presented in 1080i, while the gallery is in 1080p.

Wallander

2 Entertain → All-region BD
£50 Approx



The BBC's superb English-language adaptation of Henning Mankell's Swedish crime novels

makes for a great hi-def experience. Featuring cinematography by the likes of Anthony Dod Mantle (*Slumdog Millionaire* and *Antichrist*) and shot on RED cameras, it's hardly surprising that the six feature-length episodes included on this four-disc set look outstanding, presented as AVC 1.78:1 encodes in their original 1080i50 format. The audio is no slouch either, benefiting from atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes. Extras include a lengthy doc on Mankell's novels and more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Prisoner: The Complete Collection

ITV Studios Home Entertainment
Region B BD → £30 Approx



When it comes to TV remakes, for every *Battlestar Galactica* there's always a couple of *Flash*

Gordons waiting to stink up the schedules. And while this unnecessary refit of the cult '60s series is thankfully no *Flash Gordon*, it's no classic either. Still, this two-disc BD release is tasty, with colour-packed and textured 1080i50 1.78:1 encodes, and atmospheric, enveloping DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes. Each of the six episodes is accompanied by deleted scenes and a pair of short *Making of...* featurettes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Mad Men: Season Three

Lionsgate → All-region BD
£40 Approx



The third season of this acclaimed TV drama delivers the best batch of episodes to date, and

it continues to look razor-sharp on Blu-ray; the AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes spread across this three-disc set are uniformly excellent. And if the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix doesn't quite come up to the same lofty standards (the rears are used more for atmosphere than dynamism) it's worth remembering that this is a TV series. As with previous sets, every episode gets at least one commentary, and there are heaps of other fascinating extras squeezed in. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Being Human: Series 2

2 Entertain → All-region BD
£30 Approx



This second run of the BBC Three series about a vampire, werewolf and ghost flatshare builds

brilliantly on the groundwork of the first season. It also makes for a pleasing hi-def experience, with this three-disc BD set delivering impressive 1080i 1.78:1 encodes of all eight episodes. There's a generous spread of extras, too, including hidden content on Disc One (let the menu loop a few times...) and behind-the-scenes featurettes spread across the other two discs. The only sore point is the DD2.0 audio. A series this imaginative deserves a full 5.1 mix. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

'Remember, keep out of the black and in the red – there's nothing in this game for two in a bed'

Rhapsody in blue

Sonically and visually stunning, but we're holding out for the 3D version



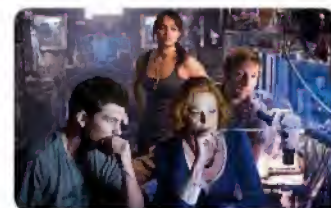
Avatar is officially the biggest film in the world, with box office takings in excess of \$2.7 billion. But as McDonalds and Nickleback have shown, just because something is phenomenally popular, it doesn't necessarily mean it's actually any good. And stripped of its spectacular 3D trappings for this initial release (surely, the movie's whole *raison d'être*), the flaws in James Cameron's epic sci-fi are more obvious than ever. While there's still fun to be had, the derivative storyline (*Dances with Pocahontas in Space*) and one-dimensional characters will leave you wishing that the filmmaker could recapture the magic he demonstrated in scripts like *Aliens* and *The Terminator*.

Mark Craven: Whatever you think of *Avatar* as a film, you can't fault the quality of the AVC 1080p encode hosted on this Blu-ray release. I couldn't find any trace of artificial sharpening, compression artefacting or noise anywhere, just incredibly detailed and vibrant visuals. Superlatives just don't do the imagery justice. However, there is one small caveat (outside of the whole 2D-3D thing), and that's the framing. When shown 'flat' at cinemas the film was presented in 2.35:1, while the 3D version was opened to 1.85:1. For some reason, Cameron has decided that this 2D BD will only carry an open matte version framed at 1.78:1, and the re-framing does become apparent in some scenes due to dead space in the image and odd

subtitle placement for Na'vi dialogue. But it's certainly not enough to make me alter my opinion that this is the hi-def benchmark all other Blu-ray transfers will be judged against.

Steve May: About as perfect a blockbuster soundtrack as is possible to imagine, *Avatar* makes for a thrilling audio experience. Delivered in 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio, the sound design offers layer upon layer of detail and incident. From Jake Sully's arrival on Pandora, where he narrowly avoids the clumping LFE of an AMP mech, to the numerous pounding action sequences that lead to the assault on the Tree of Souls, this is delicious demo material. Of course it's not just the action sequence that rock. The atmospheric are (ahem) three-dimensional as well. When you're in the Pandoran jungle, you're enveloped with subtle Foley effects. Back at the RDA base, the sound of military-grade hardware is equally omnipresent. In many ways the level of immersion offered by this audio ingenuity compensates for the lack of 3D.

Anton van Beek: This initial BD release is devoid of extra features – there's not even a BD-Live link to the featurettes and other bits 'n' bobs that will reportedly be housed on the film's official website (but which still weren't accessible two weeks after the disc's release). If it's extras you want, you'll just have to buy the ultra-super-special-mega-edition that Cameron has promised will arrive in the run-up to Christmas.



HCC VERDICT

Avatar → 20th Century Fox
All-region BD
£30 Approx

We say: The ultimate AV demo disc – but without a 3D version of the film or any extras, it's only a stopgap release

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

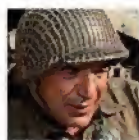
Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Kelly's Heroes

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£18 Approx



Credit due to Warner for releasing this classic WW2 action comedy in hi-def, but those hoping

for a definitive release may feel shortchanged. The only extra on offer is the original theatrical trailer, and the 1.78:1 image shows signs of print damage and some grain-filled shots. That said, the punchy colour palette will be a revelation to those used to seeing the film on TV/DVD, and the image is generally sharp and detailed. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 reboot of the original two-channel audio is also nicely put together, and adds some real flair to the bullet-filled final act. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Clash of the Titans

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£18 Approx



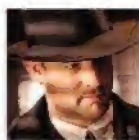
Whisper it, but the original *Clash of the Titans* is a bit of a chore to sit through. Whenever the

Kraken, Medusa or some other stop-motion beastie appears, things are fine, but the rest is a badly-acted, bland take on Greek mythology. Warner's BD occasionally looks magnificent, but unsurprisingly the VC-1 1.85:1 encode is hampered by old-fashioned optical FX. More pleasing is the decision to include a lossless DTS-HD MA 2.0 incarnation of the film's original stereo mix. The only extras are a chat with Ray Harryhausen and some mini featurettes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Road to Perdition

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£23 Approx



In the intro filmed for this disc, director Sam Mendes reveals that he wasn't convinced by Blu-ray until he

was presented with this new hi-def encode. And having experienced the subdued but brilliantly nuanced and filmic AVC 2.40:1 encode image for myself, it's easy to see why he's changed his mind. Joining the stunning picture and DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix are some superb extras – the chat track, deleted scenes and HBO Special from the DVD are joined by a new doc about cinematographer Conrad Hall and an interactive 'Library' of interviews, production art and more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Apollo 13

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Like the events it depicts, this hi-def release 'has a problem'. While not a write-off, the AVC

2.40:1 1080p encode is simply not as good as we were expecting. Some sequences look great, while others suffer from obvious DNR issues, but the biggest problem of all is that it is afflicted by contrast boosting that actually eliminates fine detail in a number of shots. It's particularly annoying, because the rest of the disc holds up well – the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix packs a punch during the launch sequence and there are some worthwhile extras. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Oh! What a lovely war

Spielberg's WWII epic now on the Blu-ray front line

Saving Private Ryan is a rollicking piece of Boy's Own cinema – a World War II drama that plays up the thrills and violence of warfare, all the while making sure that it's couched in a poignant story. But there's one problem – we all remember the film's devastating opening act, but everything that follows feels slightly flabby and anticlimactic. Is it the masterpiece that so many claim it to be?

Mark Craven: *SPR* arrives on Blu-ray with an intriguing AVC 1.85:1 encode. Technically I've no complaints with the HD image at all – even the most frenetic sequences, such as the Omaha Beach landing, are free from digital imperfections.

However, comparison with previous DVD releases demonstrates that the picture on the BD is considerably brighter, ditching crushed blacks in favour of a more nuanced and natural-looking picture. As it's been ages since I saw *SPR* at a cinema, I've no idea which is more accurate to the original look, but director Steven Spielberg approved this hi-def transfer, so I'll go with that.

Steve May: This WWII epic is often held up as a superior example of movie sound design. And yes, the film grips from the first reel with this DTS 5.1 HD MA mix. One concern, though, is the painful shrillness of the mix. I found things improved dramatically with THX post processing, with dialogue in particular benefiting.

Interestingly, Paramount has admitted that the first run of BDs (including our sample)



HCC VERDICT

Saving Private Ryan: 2-Disc SE
Paramount → All Region BD
£25 Approx

We say: Despite a few quibbles, this movie still enthralls on BD

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

suffered from an audio sync issue that occurred during Technicolour's authoring process.

This was something I spotted in Chapter 15, *Piaf*. UK customers who have already purchased the BD can call 0800 0852 613 (for free) to get details on how to receive a replacement copy.

Corrected Blu-ray discs will have a YELLOW UPC code/symbol on the back.

Anton van Beek: All of the bonus features on this release are relegated to a second Blu-ray disc and are all presented in standard-definition, with the exception of a couple of trailers (both in 1080p). There's nothing that owners of previous DVD releases won't have seen before, but the nine featurettes remain as informative as ever and compensate for the fact that Spielberg refuses to record commentary tracks. Rounding out the disc is the 88-minute documentary *Shooting War*, which chronicles World War II through archival footage.

Dying for a pint

Vampire genre reboot is a bloody impressive affair



Daybreakers serves up an intriguing twist on the vampire flick and finds fresh blood in a genre most fans thought had been milked dry. Mixing together horror, sci-fi and noir, the film is set in the near future, where a vampiric virus has taken hold and almost all humans have been converted. With blood supplies nearly exhausted, vampire scientist Edward Dalton (Ethan Hawke) spends his nights working (unsuccessfully) on an artificial substitute – only to have his world turned upside down when he meets a group of human survivors who offer another alternative: a cure.

Mark Craven: Another Blu-ray release from Lionsgate that works hard to accurately replicate some potentially tricky source material. While the film itself was shot using Panavision Genesis HD cameras, it isn't demo material, thanks to the constant colour manipulation that loads up on deep blacks and strips most colours out of the vampires' world. There's a whole load of grain, too.

That said, it's perfectly rendered, and when the action moves to daylight, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode gets a chance to shine.

Steve May: Lionsgate continues its run of top-notch soundtracks with this stunning 7.1 DTS-HD MA mix. There are numerous examples of crowd-pleasing sound design here: during an ambush/car chase weapons fire ricochets around every corner of the extended sound field, and when a vamp explodes gloopy gore splatters into in a 360-degree sonic circle. The LFE also pumps appropriately during the many action set-pieces and Christopher Gordon's orchestral score is presented with beautiful fidelity.



'What do you mean you forgot the sunblock?'



Anton van Beek: The best bonus feature on this BD is undoubtedly the 22-part 122-minute documentary *The Making of Daybreakers*. This behind-the-scenes epic guides you through every step of the film's production, from the development of the story and casting, right up to test screenings (including discussion of a change that was made to the end of the film) and its premiere. Other extras include a chat-track from filmmaking duo The Spierig Bros. and makeup/creature effects designer Steve Boyle, a BonusView mode with storyboards and animatics playing in the PIP window, a gallery of seven posters, theatrical trailer and the usual Lionsgate Blu-ray bits and pieces (LG Live link, BD Touch and MetaMenu functionality and Bookmarks).

HCC VERDICT

Daybreakers → Lionsgate Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: An exceptional Blu-ray package for an inventive and entertaining twist on vampire mythology

Picture: **1 2 3 4 5**

Sound: **1 2 3 4 5**

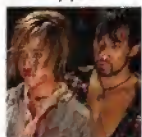
Extras: **1 2 3 4 5**

Movie: **1 2 3 4 5**

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

Raging Phoenix

Cine Asia → All-region BD
£25 Approx



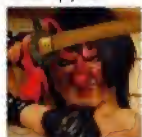
Living up to the promise of her debut flick *Chocolate*, Thai action star JeeJa Yanin's second

cinematic outing is a blast. Not only do you get plenty of sensational fight choreography, but also a delightfully daft plot involving making perfume from the tears of kidnapped women. Brilliant! This AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode packs the screen with fine detail and eye-searing colours, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is dynamic and easily the best to grace a Cine Asia release to date. Extras consist of eight interviews, a short reel of raw action footage and a couple of trailers. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Robo-Geisha

Cine Asia → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Robo-Geisha is the brainchild of Noboru Iguchi, the writer/director responsible for the outrageous

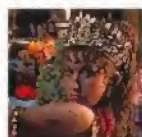
Machine Girl. An unapologetic Japanese loonfest, it tells the story of two sibling rivals in a geisha assassin training camp, indulging in escalating levels of robotic augmentation. The result is a sloppy mess of impossible weaponry – boob guns, napalm wigs, underarm blades – and incomprehensible action.

Cine Asia's Blu-ray transfer has moderate clarity and the audio is an unconventional DTS-HD MA 4.0 (L/C/R/rear) sound mix. Extras? Just a trailer, I'm afraid. **SM**

1 2 3 4 5

Caligula: The Blu Edition

Arrow Films → All-region BD/R2 DVD
£20 Approx



This BD release of the legendary (but not particularly good) historical romp features the uncut

hardcore version of the film, in an AVC 2.00:1 encode that tries hard to please, but still struggles with the flick's drab visual style. The DTS-HD MA 5.0 audio is pretty lifeless, so you're best sticking with the 2.0 option instead. Extras are plentiful (if not quite as packed as the old four-disc Imperial Edition DVD – which included other cuts of the film) and Arrow serves up yet more splendid packaging, including four choices of sleeve art and a booklet. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

City of the Living Dead

Arrow → All-region BD → R2 DVD
£23 Approx



Arrow's AVC 1.78:1 1080p transfer of this 1980s Italian zombie shocker is grainy as

hell, but that's hardly a surprise; where the HD visuals excel is with the additional detail evident in the frequent close-ups and the increased accuracy of the colour range. Exhaustive audio options include DD dual-mono, DD stereo, plus 5.1 and 7.1 versions of a DTS-HD MA remix. Excellent extras include two audio commentaries, the trailer (with four English and two Italian audio options), extensive interviews and docs, a photo gallery and alternate sleeve art and collectible booklet. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

HOME CINEMA & HI-FI

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REAL PEOPLE

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REAL VALUE

LCD & PLASMA SCREENS



Samsung **LED TV**
Next Generation TV

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freemove HD **Freeview HD**

PANASONIC

PLASMA G20

42 46 50

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freemove HD **Freeview HD**

PHILIPS

52PFL8605H 3D TV

NEW

Taking picture quality, excellence in sound and elegance in design to new heights, the Philips 8000 LED Series of TVs embodies both performance and style.

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PANASONIC

VIERA VT20 3D TV

Say goodbye to the red and green glasses and the blurry 3D images of the past. Panasonic's new NeoPDP Plasma TVs with full HD 3D use Frame Sequential technology which sends a Full HD image to each eye individually. You just need a pair of active-shutter 3D Eyewear and to sit back and step into the action.

TX-P50VT20

TX-P65VT20



DLP PROJECTORS

EPSON

EH-TW5500

Designed to bring outstanding quality to a budget-conscious home cinema enthusiast. The projector features full HD (1920 x 1080) resolution and a 200000:1 contrast ratio.



OPTOMA

HD20

HD82

These new full HD DLP projectors from Optoma combine great performance with outstanding value for money.

BLU-RAY DISC PLAYERS



PANASONIC

This new range includes the Full HD 3D capable DMP-BDT300 along with three conventional 2D players. All players blend comprehensive features, super-fast booting with superior sound and stunning HD-quality images.

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DMP-BD45

DMP-BD65

DMP-BD85

PIONEER

Get the most out of your movie experience with the luxuriously designed BDP-LX52. With a solid front aluminium panel, ice blue illumination and aluminium pre-set remote control, the player presents the best in both form and function.



BDP-320

BDP-LX52

DENON

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DBP-1610

DBP-2010

DBP-4010UD

SONY

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BDP-S370

BDP-S570

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PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO)

HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIERS & RECEIVERS

DENON

Denon's AV amplifiers and receivers continue to impress with the AVR-2310 awarded best AV receiver between £500 and £1000 by What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine. Numerous other five star reviews underline the spectacular quality of the Denon range. The latest addition is the 3D-ready AVR-1911.

AVR-1911
AVR-2310

AVR-3310
AVR-4310



PIONEER

Experience film and music just as the creators intended with Pioneer's range of AV receivers.

VSX-919AH SC-LX72
VSX-LX52 SC-LX82



ONKYO

Featuring the latest HDMI* 1.4 inputs for simple hook-up of all your high-def sources. This new 7.2-channel receiver brings compatibility with the new 3D video format, is THX-Select2 Plus certified and delivers 100 watts per channel. In addition to its Dolby ProLogic IIz height processing, it also includes Audyssey DSX height and width processing capabilities.

TX-SR608

YAMAHA

Yamaha AV amplifiers and receivers are packed with features, offer excellent sound and represent outstanding value.

The range includes the new 3D-ready RX-V567 (below) and the YSP-4100/5100 soundbars.



HOME CINEMA SPEAKERS

MONITOR AUDIO

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Home Cinema Speaker



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BRONZE BR
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RADIUS



B&W

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MT-25

MT-30

YAMAHA

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YSP-4100

YSP-5100

KEF

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KHT3005SE

KHT2005.3

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PANASONIC	TX-P50S10	£ SSAV.COM
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PANASONIC	DMP-BD65	£179
PANASONIC	DMP-EX733	£269
PANASONIC	DMP-BDT300	£ SSAV.COM
PIONEER	BDP-320	£199
PIONEER	BDP-LX52	£379
SAMSUNG	BD-C6900	£ SSAV.COM

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ARCAM	FMJ AVR500	£ SSAV.COM
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DENON	AVR-1911	£ SSAV.COM
DENON	AVR-2310	£629
DENON	AVR-3310	£849
ONKYO	TX-SR608	£449
PIONEER	VSX-919	£399
PIONEER	VSX-LX52	£749
PIONEER	SC-LX72	£1,099
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YAMAHA	RX-V567	£ SSAV.COM

AV SPEAKERS

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MONITOR AUDIO	SILVER RSFX	£199
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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Praise for The Beek

Hi, I love The Beek's column each month, and HCC #182's topic of whether or not to review movies – I'm glad this has been raised.

In years gone by, in the days of Dolby Surround, home entertainment specialist mags used to devote a large portion of a piece to sound/visual quality. Given that all who buy your mag are home theatre enthusiasts, it would seem fitting that you devote a larger space to this.

I find I don't even read the small reviews of movies on your pages as they have no detail.

Oh, and another topic I think readers would love is how to soundproof the home cinema! *Jeremy, via email*

In our defence, we'd argue that we still give a lot of space over to analysis of picture and sound quality on BD and DVDs – as much as a print magazine can anyway – for the major reviews each issue. As for the smaller reviews, these do go into less detail, but that's a trade-off from including as much software as we can. Don't forget that our website www.homecinemachoice.com features software reviews that go into far greater detail – just point your mouse at the Playback section. And while you're there, check out the Sound Sense section under the Blogs tab for our series of columns on soundproofing.

Improve my audio

Hi. I have what is probably a rather naive query.

I have a Sony 40in widescreen LCD telly, bought new last year. It works great, and I have Sky+ HD with it. My query is about speakers. Everything I



Monitor Audio's Radius One HD soundbar

read about in your magazine and elsewhere seems to suggest that one cannot just buy speakers, but a whole electrical component system is needed with a personal recorder (which I already have in the Sky box) and other major hardware components. I want a very nice speaker system for the setup but don't

want to buy unnecessary and possibly redundant equipment.

What do you suggest?
Pete, Uxbridge

As you don't say exactly how many speakers you want, there are a few options, but all of them do require more than just speakers – as speakers need amplification. None involve an additional PVR, though!

The simplest solution would be to get a soundbar, a single unit that sits under your TV and packs both speakers and amplification. This can take the audio signal from your Sky box's optical output to deliver a much better performance than your flatscreen TV. However, these don't offer true 5.1 surround sound – for that you can look at a separates



My World Cup 2010 projection

I would like to purchase a suitable projector and screen to watch some of the football World Cup games with my family and friends this Summer. My current setup includes Sky+HD and an Anchor Bay iScan DVDO VP50Pro. I intend to connect the projector to the iScan via a Van Damme 20 metre RGBHV-to-VGA 'red series' lead. My criteria are as follows: The projector must be from a reputable manufacturer (one that HCC has scored highly); it must display in 16:9 format (assuming that pictures will be transmitted in this), and also be capable of projecting a decent sharp, deep picture size of ideally 120in. As this setup is only going to be used for this year's World Cup football and then be put away until the

2012 Olympic Games, I don't want to spend silly money – a second-hand bargain from an auction site sounds the best proposition. To cut the cost of my outlay further, I am also considering making a screen out of MDF or plywood and painted white. I will be covering the screen three-sides and back with a makeshift frame and then drape a thick black cloth over it to block out unwanted sunlight.

The problem is... where do I start?
Andrew Potter, Berkshire

A second-hand projector could indeed be a bargain, but if you want one guaranteed to last until the 2012 Olympics you might be better off purchasing a

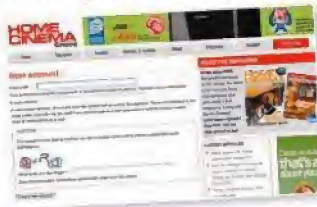
brand-new model. The cost of PJs has fallen a lot, and quality HD machines from BenQ, Optoma, Vivitek are all available for under £1,000 – we'd definitely recommend investigating the latter's H1080FD, runner up in our



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On the home page of www.homecinemachoice.com, scroll down the right-hand side of the page until you see the Login box. Click the *Join Here* button, choose a username and then create your profile. You can upload an image to represent you online and use your signature to tell fellow AV fans about your own system automatically every time you post. Joining the big AV debate online has never been easier!



system (eg buy a 5.1 speaker set and a dedicated AV receiver) or an all-in-one home cinema system. The latter are typically quite affordable, but usually ship with a Blu-ray or DVD player, which may be what has confused you.

Kuro obsolete!

This time last year I bought what you described as 'The best TV in the world bar none' – the Pioneer PDP LX6090. Whilst this is a fabulous TV, I now find it's already obsolete as I can't watch 3D on it. Surely if I was to film a 3D movie like *Avatar* on an HD camcorder, and assuming I could avail myself of a pair of the special

glasses that you wear in the cinema, I would get the same 3D effect at home. So why do we need special TVs?
Chris Johns, via email

We originally reviewed that TV in HCC #159, which was on sale August 2008, so it is almost two years old – and barring its incompatibility with 3D, is still an outstanding performer. As for recording *Avatar* on an HD camcorder in the cinema... that's not going to work, for reasons that we haven't room to go into here. You're more than welcome to try, but don't blame us when you get arrested!

Is 3D safe?

What do you think is going to happen with the health problems 3DTV sets cause?

The issue which everyone is aware of now is that the sets (particularly active shutter) can cause you to temporarily lose your perception of depth, and in kids, maybe permanently. It happens because the brain uses ten types of sensory signals to tell depth. But these 3D sets only use one – the different image to the left and right eye. Exposure to this for hours a day can cause the brain to start ignoring the other nine signals when not watching the TV.

Television manufacturers are releasing gentle health warnings, but if people start having car accidents because they can't perceive depth properly, and kids start walking into walls, will that really protect them from being sued?

I am guessing the full auto stereoscopic screens which don't need glasses would not cause this problem. Maybe TV

manufacturers should invest in trying to make this technology cheap enough for the masses to afford.

John, via email

Despite manufacturers being ultra-cautious with their health warnings, there's no real reason to assume that 3D will have any effect on health. But if it does, autostereoscopic screens might cause the same problems. It's not cost keeping them off the market, more their limited 3D effectiveness. Anyway, don't worry – we reckon that mobile phones will kill us all before 3D does.

Reference that

Great review of the Klipsch speakers, HCC #180. I was thinking of upgrading my Energy Veritas speakers and, if memory serves me right, I believe HCC's Adam Rayner had a set himself. If so, has he kept the Veritas speakers or upgraded to something else? I'd be grateful for any feedback.

Jon Mitchell, Twickenham

Adam says: I'm delighted you liked the review and you are entirely correct about the Energy Veritas having been my 'reference' set for many years. In the event, mine had issues with the piano-black finish coming away from both enclosures – although their performance remained solid. However, as far as the upgrade, it was quite a big one, in that while I keep and run the ridiculous REL Stentor III, I also run Bowers & Wilkins' ASW825 sub and have a set of its 800 Series dominating my room – HTM3, 804 & 805. They are a similar size to the Energy Veritas, but further upmarket. Of course, I'm wondering right now if I should step up to the new Series 800 Diamond range – so yes, I did upgrade... but that ache for something even better never goes away.

Write to Letters, Home Cinema Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW, or email us at hcc@futurenet.co.uk. Due to the volume of letters we receive we cannot guarantee to print/answer them all.

Awards last issue and available for around £750.

Also, we'd suggest hooking your new projector up directly to a Sky+HD unit through HDMI, as this will result in better-quality HD images than using the component output.

We like your idea of a DIY projection screen – indeed, some of our readers have taken this approach. Our advice, though, would be to make a frame and stretch over it an appropriate quantity of purpose-designed screen material such as that available from www.drhscreens.co.uk.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Andrew Potter wins a copy of *The Wolfman: Extended Director's Cut* on Blu-ray courtesy of Universal Pictures. It's available to buy from June 7, priced £25.

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Home Cinema

*...so good, being there
is the next best thing?*



How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that meets your expectations in terms of quality of picture and sound? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video,

component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match,

or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.”



Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it

works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.



LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY
9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA
69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040

Ealing AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI
441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR
Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.
0131 555 3963

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO
135 Great Western Road.
0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

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SELECT

→ **Buying Guide** **BEST EVER LCD TV** The top performing LCD screens in the UK revealed **HI-DEF PLAYERS** Looking for a Blu-ray deck? We help you choose **PLASMA POWER** Your guide to the ultimate bigscreen TV **ROCKIN' RECEIVERS** The best specs and latest codecs **SUPREME SPEAKERS** Need a 5.1 package? We name the best! **PLUS** subwoofers, projectors, PVRs & more...

TOP
BUYER'S GUIDE
**All killer
no
filler**



HCC Ratings key

Officially awesome **1 2 3 4 5**
Essential purchase **1 2 3 4 5**
Does the job **1 2 3 4 5**
Disappointing **1 2 3 4 5**
Don't touch it **1 2 3 4 5**

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-40EX503
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LCD with built-in Freeview HD tuner and Bravia Internet Video

Highs: Free HD channels on tap; value for money; 'net interactivity'

Lows: CCFL backlight

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



PHILIPS
46in → 46PFL9704
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Second-gen LED backlit LCD improves on its predecessor

Highs: Excellent control over local dimming; Net TV functionality; gorgeous finish

Lows: Premium price tag

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SAMSUNG
40in → UE-40C7000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut 3DTV outstands in other areas, too

Highs: Next-gen tech; Freeview HD tuner; app store

Lows: Fiddly control system; 3D effect needs a bigger display

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Via HDMI only
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
42in → 42SL9000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LG's LED-lit 'Seamless' LCD offers excellent value for money

Highs: Exceptional pictures; ISF-certified calibrated controls

Lows: Black levels aren't A-list; 'Seamless' design isn't all that

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SHARP
46in → LC-46LE821E
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quad Pixel edge-lit LED TV with innovative in-built Flash PVR

Highs: Amazing levels of fine detail; great colour fidelity; useful Time Shift function

Lows: No video streaming

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.sharp.co.uk

Also Recommended...



JVC
32in → LT-32WX50
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Installer-friendly 32in monitor with a wide colour gamut

Highs: Jaw-dropping ultra-slim design; terrific colour response and still image playback

Lows: Backlight inconsistencies

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 2
No. of Scart inputs: 0
No. of component inputs: Via D-Sub adaptor
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: No

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.jvc.co.uk



SAMSUNG
32in → LE40B650
£700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Look for good deals on this 2009-issue 40in LCD

Highs: Superb features; excellent all-round pics; design

Lows: Audio performance is pretty pathetic

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



TOSHIBA
46in → 46SV685DB
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut LED-backlit screen from Tosh is a real eye-opener

Highs: Excellent contrast and detail; good quality audio; multimedia talents

Lows: Not particularly stylish

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.toshiba.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. Whether the concept takes hold remains to be seen, though.

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit: www.philips.co.uk



→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy

Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and DVB-S2 tuner

Tested: Issue 164
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD

Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set

Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50G20
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freeview HD and Freesat HD plasma is the FTA king

Highs: Performance; price; Freesat/Freeview HD tuners;

Lows: USB recording mode comes with strings attached

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
32in → 32P66000
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity

Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel

Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 154
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
42in → TX-P42G15
£850 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freesat HD NeoPDP at an enticing price

Highs: Wide viewing angle; excellent HD pics

Lows: Lacks brightness; three HDMI's only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail

Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC Input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD



Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



DENON
Blu-ray → DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx



Reference universal Blu-ray player that sets new standards

Highs: Stunning life-like picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling
Lows: Complex to set up; not for those on a budget!

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-C6900
£350 Approx



Early adopters will love this 3D Blu-ray player

Highs: 3D compatibility; video quality; USB file support
Lows: v1.4 HDMI output means hookup to older AVRs will be via 7.1 outputs

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx



Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection; 7.1 analogue outputs
Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD85
£300 Approx



New top-of-the line deck – until the 3D player arrives...

Highs: Overall picture and sound performance; 'Tube' sound emulator for CDs
Lows: Somewhat sluggish menus; Wi-Fi via dongle only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi via dongle; SD card slot; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



DENON
Blu-ray → DBP-1610
£400 Approx



Affordable Denon deck benefits from brand's attention to detail

Highs: Good, natural-looking picture; quality audio performance; great value
Lows: No analogue outs; slow to load our test disc

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; SD card slot for BD-Live

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S760 → £380 Approx



Sony has a few Blu-ray decks now that are comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console, and the keenly-priced S760 is our favourite. It incorporates the HD Reality Enhancer and Super Bit-Mapping picture-processing tech of its £1,200 BDP-S5000ES stablemate (albeit in a thinner chassis) and the results are startling – detailed, deep, colour-rich HD visuals and quality surround sound delivery. Some might miss the lack of esoteric codec support (no MKV here, folks) but that's not what this Sony is about – consider it a reference machine for the budget-conscious.

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx



Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound
Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx



Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image
Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S360
£190 Approx



Affordable Sony Blu-ray is a real rival to its PS3

Highs: Stylish design and good AV performance; very solid construction
Lows: External memory required for BD-Live access

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess

Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Large HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent

Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sagem.com/uk



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures

Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



GRUNDIG
Freesat PVR → GUFSDTR500HD
£280 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Dual-tuner Freesat+ PVR with capacious 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; cool-running; efficient upscaling of non-HD channels

Lows: USB port is disabled

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.topfield.co.uk

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability

Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX773
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

DVD/HDD recorder that misses out on Freeview HD

Highs: Solid AV performance; heaps of features and recording flexibility

Lows: No infra-red control over STB; single Freeview tuner only

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: No – USB/SD via USB instead
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850 → £1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility.

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

AV Receivers

Best on test...



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX82
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

ICE-powered AIR Studios-tuned AVR replaces the SC-LX81

Highs: Punchy, highly detailed sound; brilliant features; looks fabulous; solid build

Lows: Pioneer doesn't do height/width processing

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 190W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



YAMAHA
AVR → RX-V2065
£850 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

New-look Yamaha receiver is a great sub-£1K all-rounder

Highs: Superb networking prowess; wonderful natural sound that suits all material

Lows: GUI takes some getting used to

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.yamaha.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR5007
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

9.2-channel HD receiver with exhaustive features and power

Highs: First-class home cinema performance; processing allows 9-channel height/width audio

Lows: No proprietary anti-jitter tech, Wi-Fi or secondary remote

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



ONKYO
Amp/Processor
PR-SC5500/PA-MC5500
£3,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Onkyo's separates system delivers on all AV fronts

Highs: Massive power reserves; Smooth AV performance
Lows: Sizeable and weighty

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (FM/AM/net)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Ultra2
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



SONY
AVR → STR-DH800
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Slick, flexible bargain model with provision for wireless multiroom audio

Highs: Superb value; big and smooth sound; easy to use

Lows: No video upscaling or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 85W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: No
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No, unless you use S-Air wireless speakers
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

DENON
AVR → AVR-4810
£2,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Denon's AVR-4810 is the current king of the new breed of receivers that make all sorts of speaker configurations possible. Thanks to Audyssey DSX and Dolby Pro-Logic IIz processing, it's capable of driving an 11.3-channel system (with the aid of an extra stereo amp), and it'll have you re-arranging your speakers in no time. Beyond this mastery of new formats, the AVR-4810 delivers a rich, powerful sound and a full suite of features from Net radio and integrated Wi-Fi to a wide choice of inputs and four-zone multiroom. Brilliant.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.denon.co.uk

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: AM/FM/Net
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)



Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.nadelectronics.com



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR807
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Powerful and potent height/width processor at a great price

Highs: Full-on gung-ho sound with massive bass; DSX/DPLIIz processing; excellent upscaling

Lows: Slightly flimsy build; no USB or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 180W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (71)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Projectors

Best on test...



INFOCUS
DLP → ScreenPlay SP8602
£3,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

New-look LCD projector from a much-revered brand

Highs: Excellent picture quality; good range of adjustments; different 'skins'
Lows: Not as flexible to set up as some; slightly noisy runner

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 3
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,500 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.infocus.com



VIVITEK
DLP → H1085
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A brilliant Full HD projector at a mouth-watering price

Highs: Rich colours; excellent image tweaks; 12V trigger
Lows: Noisy runner in high brightness mode; some low-level noise in darker scenes

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com



SONY
SXRD → VPL-VW85
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Successor the VW80 delivers a truly cinematic picture

Highs: Astonishing contrast and detail levels; plenty of picture tweaks
Lows: MotionFlow tech is best left unused

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk/biz



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW5500
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Epson's flagship home cinema projector does LCD proud

Highs: Lots of features; easy and flexible to setup; produces the finest LCD pictures yet
Lows: More expensive than rivals; can lose focus a little

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 200,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.epson.co.uk



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Updated flagship PJ adds red-rich lamp and 12V trigger

Highs: Smooth filmic pictures; easy to setup and use; handy feature set
Lows: Boxy design; be careful with high frame-rate settings

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 100,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Also Recommended...



BENQ
DLP → W1000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A £1K Full HD projector with good colour presets

Highs: Very sharp HD pictures; alluring tactile finish; plenty of fine-tuning options
Lows: Rainbow effect; noticeable fan noise

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 3,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 27dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
benq.co.uk



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness
Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan
Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com

Editor's Choice...

JVC
D-ILA → HD950
£6,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Put simply, JVC's new video-chucker is capable of an awe-inspiring performance. Spin up a Blu-ray and you'll be rewarded with three-dimensional, natural-looking pictures that are packed with detail, shadow subtlety and vibrant colours. Setting up the HD950 is made easy by its fully-motorised optical adjustments, and a THX-certified colour preset for those not wanting to get their hands dirty in its extensive calibration menus. It's an almost silent runner, too. The best PJ we've yet seen at this price point.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.jvc.co.uk

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 900 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 400.3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173

For more info visit:
www.bostonacoustics.com



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170

For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176

For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



BOWERS & WILKINS
5.1 → CM Series
£4,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top quality 5.1 array in a classical wood finish

Highs: True sweet highs from hi-tech tweeters; brilliant 10in woofer; solid construction
Lows: Square-edge design not exactly high-end

→ Specifications

Power handling: 3 x 200W, 2 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 179

For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



KLIPSCH
5.1 → Icon system
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sleek-looking US-made system with horn technology

Highs: High-quality audio; excellent value for money; clever, simple-to-use subwoofer
Lows: Not suited to large-scale home cinema rooms

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 125W, 2 x 75W, 1 x 100
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 180

For more info visit:
www.klipsch.co.uk

Also Recommended...



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 8 THX Ultra2
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 system with THX Ultra2 certification

Highs: Full-fat THX performance at a low-price; huge, potent subwoofer
Lows: Mail-order only means there's no chance to try before you buy

→ Specifications

Power handling: 3 x 120W, 2 x 80W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 600W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 181

For more info visit:
www.teufel.eu



WHARFEDALE
5.1 → Diamond 10 HCP
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sub/sat system mixes hi-fi roots with a 10in woofer

Highs: Powerful subwoofer; exciting treble; highly musical
Lows: A little bright at high volume; might not be visceral enough for action movie fans

→ Specifications

Power handling: 4 x 75W, 1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 150W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176

For more info visit:
www.wharfedale.co.uk



FOCAL JMLAB
5.1 → Dome
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Bold, full and detailed sound quality for music and home cinema; gorgeous design
Lows: Large cabinets offer more presence; bit pricey

→ Specifications

Power handling: 5 x 100W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Aluminium; red, black, white; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 178

For more info visit:
www.focal-uk.com

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.



Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.kef.com/gb

→ Specifications

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance

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Subwoofers

Best on test...



NAIM
SW → n-Sub
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class AB amp-driven premium-level subwoofer

Highs: Rich, textured bass with tight control; innovative features
Lows: High-end rivals have a bit more grunt to 'em

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 2-Hz-250Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 350W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29.6kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.naim-audio.com



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent i
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance
Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.martinlogan.com



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control
Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



TANNOY
SW → TS1201
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

12in sub with simultaneous LFE and speaker level inputs

Highs: Smart looks; easy of use; real weight and presence
Lows: Remote control will cost you extra

→ Specifications

Frequency response: Down to 21Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 16.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.tannoy.com



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration
Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.velodyne.com

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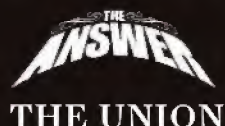
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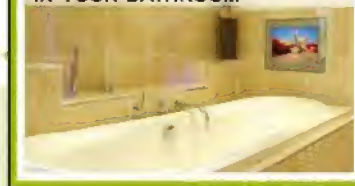
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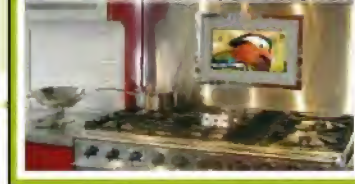


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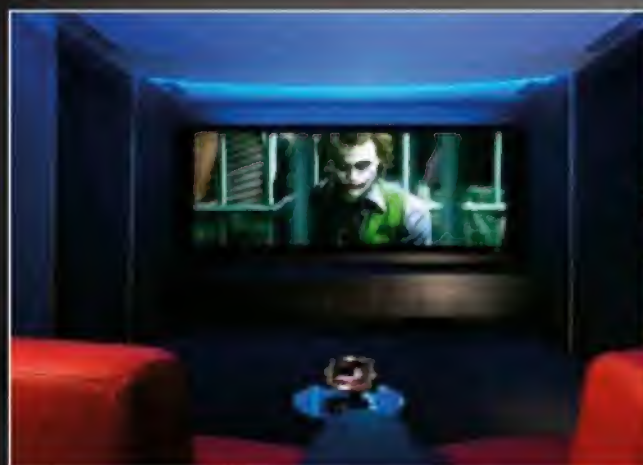
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Space Odyssey

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